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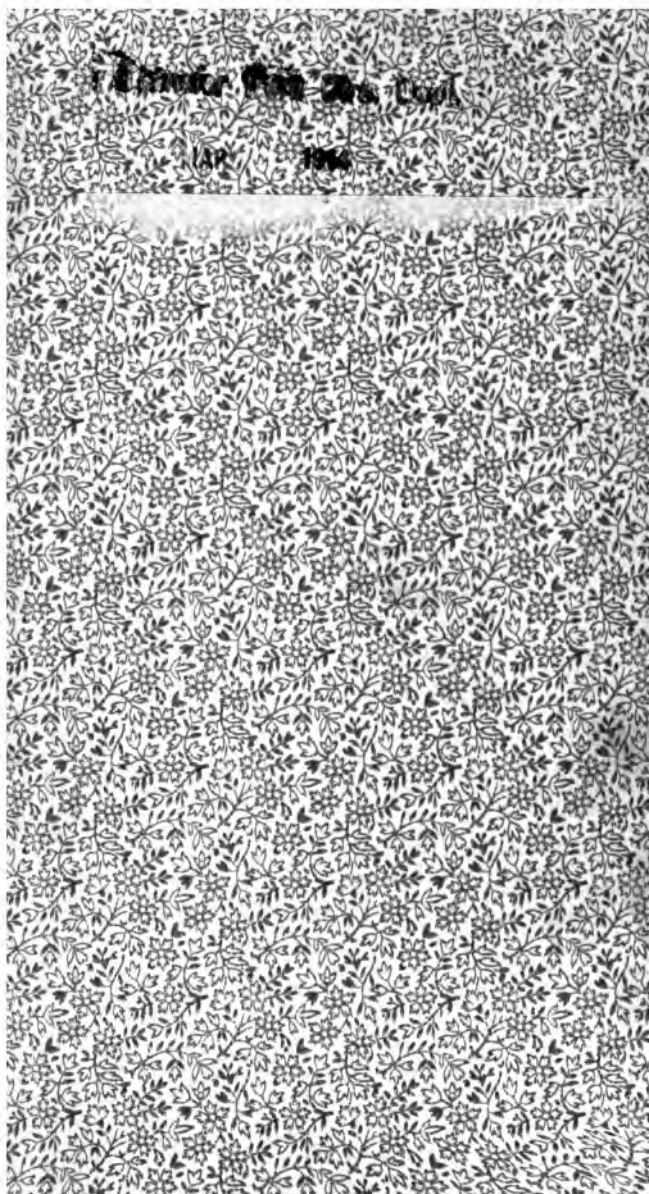


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1. Fiction (American)

QUAINT CRIPPEN

COMMERCIAL TRAVELER.

BY

ALWYN M. THURBER

For forms of government let fools contest;
Whate'er is best administered is best;
For modes of faith let graceless zealots fight;
His can't be wrong whose life is in the right.

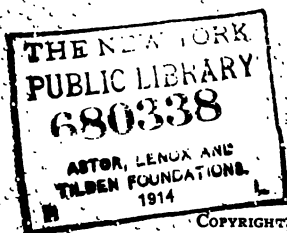
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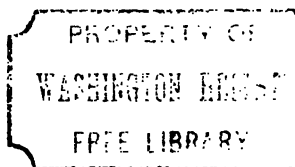
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QUAINT CRIPPEN,
COMMERCIAL TRAVELER.

CHAPTER I.

HOW QUAINT CRIPPEN ever came to be identified with our house, tradition only knows. He was with us, traveled for us, sold our goods. Further than that no question need be asked. Over Quaint's outrageous ways my partner often became exasperated. I was frequently that, but I usually took Quaint's part to keep up a sort of equilibrium in affairs until he was out of sight; then I tried to forget him.

Our house sold staple goods, and of course did not need to employ much style. But we had a dignity; yes, we consoled ourselves upon our dignity, which had grown gray with over forty years of solid existence, —

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existence, if you will, in that one city of cities, consequential Boston. We sold staples. Quaint knew the trade to a nicety, but a fellow more tragically unconventional never lived. My partner could sum the whole matter up with the skill of a professor.

"Confound the rascal!" he would begin, then stop for want of words to fittingly express his ire. "Quaint has gone stark mad riding those hobbies of his. Why can't he sober down, have some self-pride, and do credit to the house he is working for? As it is, he is up to his elbows in something nobody else would ever dream of. Mad? — why, he is a veritable nuisance! — in his way," he would muse, with a spark of dreaminess in his tone. Then his ire would kindle again, and he would say vehemently: "He never seems to get into a railroad wreck, of course. You can't down him any more than you can a shadow!"

"But the sales he makes —" was my invariable reply, and then we would stand for a moment and glare at each other.

"Yes — hang it! — there's the rub. The sales he makes are scandalously large; but

how does he make them? He never attends to business. How does he make them, I say?" and my associate would repeat the question with the direst of accents.

"I cannot say, I am sure," I would sigh; and so our talk would end as it had ended scores of times before.

By the way, though, here comes Quaint now, ambling along with his two grips, a grin upon his face, and an air about him which you would never credit to a man of business, much less to a seller of goods for a Boston house of prominence.

"Chippy!" (Quaint called me Chippy for no earthly reason),—"Chippy, I say, see here! Do you know what I would do if I were you?" Quaint had dropped his grips and stood mopping his brow with an old-fashioned red bandanna. "Yes, I say—do you know what I would do if I belonged to a firm like this?"

"Why, you would put on a new necktie and get married."

"See here, my elderly friend, I am in a serious mood this morning, and train leaves Kneeland Street in thirty minutes. This is

what I would do if I belonged to a firm like Currywell and Cramps. I'd pluck that tired, solemn look from under my eyebrows, and *try* and look happy. Say, Chippy, you and old Blueblood won't last much longer. Do you know it?"

Of course I would smile charitably.

"Because, do you know, Chippy, earth is no place for weary angels; and, besides, if you will just trot out that money-order I guess I will scratch for the train. Be quick, now; time's nearly up."

And so my partner and I lived and suffered. Quaint could n't have been a gentleman if he had tried, — a gentleman, if you please, after the Bostonese idea, — Puritanic ancestors, respectable antecedents, antiquated heirlooms. Quaint had n't the remotest idea what respectability was.

Ah, there, yes; see him at this very moment hobbling across the street. He will insist on carrying his own luggage; and when he hails a street car — well, the car comes to a halt, of course.

Just as the last remnant of his coat lapels disappears from sight, I turn about and heave

what might be termed a sigh of troubled relief.

Poor Quaint! will the world be any better for your having lived in it? What could have happened to the mold upon which you were cast? Crazy? Why, no; but if he ever gets to heaven it will be after all the other saints are let in. His thousand and one virtues will need to be scrutinized very, very systematically. I can imagine the smile that will come upon Saint Peter's face, for Quaint's record will be little better than smeared over with a happy halo,—a sort of slipshod, breezy goodness of heart at best. As I see it, he will have to get in on these, if at all.

Thoughts like these, however, I never made known to my partner. I seldom bothered him with trifles.

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CHAPTER II.

IF the reader of this would just as soon, why not take a run with Quaint down the road a ways, just to see what he is like. After the little I have told you, you may find him a morsel worth studying. Make a mental picture of him if you will, and then oblige the writer of this by classifying him in the great category of moving curiosities. After knowing Quaint for so many years, I have never found just the place for him. I would get on the train, casually observe him from a distance if possible; you need not be overly anxious to form his acquaintance, but sort of look idly on and hear him talk.

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Yes, yes; ever the same. Those stuffy cars — indeed! Quaint can scarcely squeeze himself and his two grips past the crowded seats.

"Excuse me, madam! Did n't mean it. Baby must have caught hold of my coat button, I guess. There, now, he's all right," and Quaint with fatherly ways set the little one upright, and, chucking him under the chin, moved on.

A tall, overawing stranger was occupying a seat with only a valise for company. Quaint, with that dextrous air and beaming countenance customary with a drummer who has been out before, tossed his coat into the seat, and made as if it were the most gracious thing in the world to sit down beside said overawing stranger. With a gingerly deliberateness the latter slowly pulled his valise beneath his feet. Depositing his own baggage in a corner of the car, Quaint sank into the seat with all the affability imaginable.

"If it was n't a whim of mine to smile, I would frown these soulless corporations out of existence," were Quaint's first words to the stranger, who, drawing his coat closer about him, seemed to move a shade nearer the window. He might have been the Boston and Albany president for all Quaint cared.

"That reminds me of a pretty little figure I saw put upon paper the other day — got a card in your pocket handy? — thanks," and Quaint whipped out his pencil and began drawing a circle upon the card. He made a small dot in the center.

"There, this circle is the earth. That all belongs to the Boston and Albany Railroad. They don't want it, — oh, no, they don't want it, only mentally. But had I time I would draw the circle full of such worldly possessions as the road does want. But we can imagine all that by the crowded condition of this car to-day. Now, this dot here — do you see that dot?" Casting a sickening side-glance down upon Quaint, the stranger barely nodded. "Well, that dot, small as it is, is the public. See? Pretty small fry to be mixed up in the goods, chattels, and belongings of a powerful railroad corporation. If the puny sickling gets lost in the shuffle, what cares the corporation? Now, on the other hand, if the public owned the railroads —" and Quaint was about to launch out into one of his pet theories about "National Control," etc., when his

eye chanced to rest upon the name printed upon the reverse side of the stranger's card.

"Rev. Conscious Cleric, D.D., F.R.S., etc., etc., President of the World's Foreign Missionary League, and Special Examiner of Credentials of Candidates for work abroad."

While getting his breath Quaint read another sentence, printed in small type in the left-hand corner of the card: "And Follower of Christ."

With a show of good-natured amazement Quaint stopped speaking and looked up in time to catch a mere glance from the Reverend's eye. While there may have been a spark of vanity in that glance, it for the moment filled Quaint with a terrible feeling of littleness. But just then a happy idea struck him.

"Say, my dear sir, we are in the same launch, so to speak, — only you have attained to the heights of your ambition, while I am only on the road. Do you grasp it?"

The stranger pressed his thin lips more tightly together, and looked as if he could have shrugged his shoulders without the aid of a surgeon.

“On your card you mention, incidentally, that you are a follower of Christ. So am I, my dear Reverend, and I am heartily glad to have met you. I don't breathe the secret to everybody, but, do you know, sir, that I am going to India as a missionary myself some day.”

The cold gray eyes of Reverend Conscious Cleric turned slowly again upon Quaint, and his face came near melting into a smile. But as he did not smile, only a look like grim contempt for his fellow-passenger appeared in its place.

Quaint felt like giving it up at first, but he instinctively wondered if he had n't better try something else. The train was by this time moving out of Boston, and Quaint's full tone of voice had begun to attract the attention of the other passengers near them.

“What do you think of the fellow who swallowed the horned toad?” Quaint abruptly queried.

Like magic four other passengers bent their heads forward to listen, while the Reverend put his finger upon the page he was

reading, and turned a stern look of inquiry upon Quaint.

“Why, yes; here it is in the ‘Globe’ in black and white. *You* may have read it?” he said, turning to the gentleman behind him. But the latter shook his head. “Swallowed the thing, horns and all. Now I say that to believe a yarn like that, one has got to get used to story-telling by degrees. I am not an expert myself. I like a person who is very, very reliable, — one who gets hold of a probable story and sticks to it. The whale, we are told, swallowed Jonah literally. This we must believe, of course. About the horned toad, why, we need n’t believe it unless we are a mind to. Don’t you see it that way, Reverend?”

“I do not know that I catch your meaning,” were the first words of the Reverend Conscious Cleric; and such accents! Quaint winced at the scholarly base of his voice, each syllable was so measured and exact. But Quaint’s safety lay in his tongue.

“It’s an out-and-out bald-headed lie!” he affirmed, tragically smiting the paper he

held. "A newspaper that will print such stuff —"

But just then the passenger in the rear began to cough, and the three other interested listeners leaned wearily back in their seats and yawned, while the Reverend Conscientious Cleric again found his place and resumed his reading. Quaint's story had proved only a false alarm. But, in very truth, it must have been Quaint's purpose to break the ice, merely, for some more deserving talk. Instead of fabulous things, he would have liked to obtain from the stranger at his side a few valuable pointers on Foreign Missionary work, but somehow that mountain of dignity would n't talk.

Do we wonder that fellows like Quaint so often dip into fiction to get a little neighborly attention? Very frequently it takes a fabrication of the rankest sort to wake up an average fellow-mortal. The faster the train travels, the more spurious a story will be believed; and a commonly honest citizen at home will laugh and enjoy himself, most assuredly. Well, well, if the yarn in the "Globe" had n't been rank enough in non-

sense to arouse to sociability a man of the Reverend's caliber, what in the name of witchcraft would?

These were Quaint's thoughts as he turned an idle gaze out of the window.

CHAPTER III.

“I SAY, Reverend, I never smoke; do you?”

Quaint's fellow-passenger had found it necessary to cut a few leaves in his book, and this gave Quaint an opening. The Reverend looked aghast at his interrogator, but under his withering glance Quaint moved not a muscle.

“Never,” spoke the man of cloth. There were volumes else in the word, — a sort of sledge-hammer directness, so to speak.

“Glad to hear it,” put in Quaint. “It makes one feel more at ease to find a fellow-mortal aboard like himself. I had a mother once, and she told me squarely and firmly one day that it was wrong to use tobacco or liquor. That settled it; so I never have. How did you come to abstain?”

“Really, sir, such habits are contemptible,” spoke the Reverend, briefly.

"I know ; but had you a mother to tell you that ?"

"A truly sanctified soul needs no urging to do right."

"Yes — I see —" bridled Quaint, nearly choking with chagrin. "But, come, now, to throw all joking aside, must a fellow be born perfect — sanctified, as you call it — before he can become a full-fledged foreign missionary?" Quaint was getting desperate. Reverend Conscious had cut his leaves and was finding his place to read. But before he resumed his book he drew from his inside pocket two small tracts, which he charitably handed to Quaint.

"The True Measure of Salvation." "How to Seek Heaven in Adversity."

"Thanks," smiled Quaint, humbly, and then the Reverend resumed his reading. Quaint glanced the tracts over a moment, then arose and went forward to get a drink of water. Into the mirror he looked at himself and smiled. It was the same old, negligent, happy-go-lucky smile. What a dreadfully ordinary mortal he was, to be sure ! But Quaint tried not to think of that. He

believed he would have been supremely happy could he have found some one to talk to upon the subject of Foreign Missions. This was his hobby number one, and he felt sure he could ride it as furiously as a man with a dozen initials after his name.

"Pedro?" queried Quaint, pausing before a group of men, one of whom was dealing the cards.

"Won't you have a hand?" spoke a rather feminine member of the group, politely offering Quaint his seat.

"No, thanks, I guess not. I'm only going a little farther," drawled Quaint, somewhat dubiously. But he nevertheless stood and watched the game for several minutes.

"Say, neighbor, why in the name of mischief didn't you play your pedro first?" he expostulated, with the vehemence of an old-time gamester. Then followed a lively scrimmage as to the propriety of the way the man had played. The train was just pulling out of Worcester; and when the discussion abated Quaint began to think of the stop he was soon to make. He believed he must have one word more with the dignified passenger in his seat

"I am feeling a little down-hearted to-day, Reverend. Can't help it; it's human I s'pose to get the blues occasionally. But that's me to-day, sure enough."

The Reverend let his eyes wander slowly up at Quaint, who stood leaning upon the seat.

"Are you a Christian, sir?" he asked.

"Me a Christian? You can bet a solemn dollar I am, — a double-barreled, dyed-in-the-wool, all-round Christian, — that's me. Here's my card. You know I just mentioned the fact that we were jolly fellows well met. Still, some say I'm a little peculiar. I have a friend a couple of stations ahead of here who is dying. Poor fellow! we've been chums on many a trip; but I guess Foxy's done for this time. I am going to stop off and see him."

Farther than a half-absent nod, this drew little response from the Reverend. With his dignity still intact, he let his eyes wander back to his book, and, turning away, Quaint heaved a troubled sigh. He went back and stood at the rear-car window, and watched the ties and roadbed spin themselves out behind the train. He was standing here in

dreamy contemplation, when the brakes began tugging and grumbling, and the trainman yelled out the station. Seizing his two grips, Quaint threw the Reverend a pleasant nod, then hustled out upon the depot platform.

Into the hotel opposite he ambled and tossed his baggage to the clerk. Everybody down this way knew Quaint. It was a small town, and without a word he thrust his two hands into his pockets and sauntered away down the road. Before long he came to a very humble but neatly kept cottage. The door swung open as if by magic, for it was evident they were expecting Quaint.

"How's Foxy to-day?" Quaint seemed to have suddenly cast off his heavy-heartedness, and was smiling like a schoolboy.

A tear came to the tired mother's eye.

"Oh, pshaw! that won't do. Come, my dear woman, catch hold of a little of my faith, won't you?"

A moan of welcome came from the bedroom.

"Yes, it's me, Foxy. Of course you are better now; but how have you been since last week? Oh, me? I've been first-rate. Trade '

just booming!" and Quaint sat down astride a chair in the most comradely way.

"Quaint!" the voice sounded scarcely audible.

"Yes, Foxy; what is it?"

"Don't get rattled, will you, Quaint — but — say, old boy, *this is my last trip!*"

"Eh?" spoke Quaint. He did n't want to understand. The poor fellow's words sounded dreadfully real. For the first time he had taken a square look into the sunken eyes of his chum. A heavy thumping came under his vest. A sob came from the other room.

"Don't you believe it, Foxy," entreated Quaint; but somehow his own words sounded hollow and unnatural.

Then came a long fit of coughing, and a silence after that.

"I say, Quaint — bend a little closer, will you, please." Quaint put his ear down near the speaker's lips. "They say every cloud has a silver lining," spoke Foxy, feebly. "I am happy in spite of it all. Mother is a Christian, you know, and I guess she'll get over it. You won't forget mother, will you, Quaint?"

"I can't think it's so, Foxy. Try ~~and~~ rally, can't you? Come, now."

"And, Quaint," came the voice, now by piecemeal, "does this end all? Do you suppose a fellow will get another chance?"

A long interval of silence. "I'll be blessed if I know, Foxy. I have never thought about it. What does the Parson say?"

But Foxy's eyes were closed and remained so for several minutes.

"I can't help but think I am ticketed through, Quaint — limited — no stop-over. See the point?" and a satisfied smile overspread the pallid features. "Did you ask me what the Parson thinks? Well, the Parson, he's queer. Thinks I am just a little heathenish, I guess. But he doesn't know me, does he, Quaint?"

Quaint was obliged to cough a little and turn aside to hide a tear which was trickling off his cheek. What a shock it had cost him, really! He had never so much as dreamed that the end was so near. After the sick man's last words, he seemed to relapse into a comatose state, and Quaint's over-anxious eyes watched the fixed, waxen pallor which

was stealing over his features. It was evident that the talk had weakened him, and possibly he might never rally to say as much again. Quaint glanced at his watch. In thirty minutes the next local express would be along. Must he leave his once jolly chum to die like this? Stout hearts feel the deepest. With one long craving, lingering look down upon the dying man, he at last turned desperately away and came out to speak to the weeping mother. But the great lumps in his throat choked his words. In fifteen minutes his train would be here. With the alertness of one who could not withstand the temptation, he pulled a roll of bills from his pocket, tossed it upon the table, then fairly strode out of the house. It was the greater part of his little store of savings, but his heart went with it, so he would not complain.

“Zounds! but it hurts,” sighed Quaint, never so much as turning about to look back. “Poor Foxy! he thinks he is ticketed through — no stop-over; but it’s not so deuced hard for Foxy as it is for the rest of us, — I’ll be blest if it is.”

A long, shrill whistle broke into Quaint's revery, and instantly the rumbling, hiss of a locomotive shot into view. Quaint had barely time to get his grips and jump aboard. He stopped for but a few seconds, then away sped the ruthless train to fulfill the law of destiny, planned, scheduled, and driven by the hand of man.

CHAPTER IV.

SPRINGFIELD next, and Hartford for the night. A feeling of strangeness had come upon Quaint. It was a mood in which, had he been in the midst of hilarity, he would have been hilarious; in the midst of weeping he could have wept. That evening at the hotel he amused a bevy of fellow-travelers telling them stories. An intense fire of some kind burned in his eyes, and this alone was sufficient to draw an audience about him. His words were fierce, then they were fraught with the keenest wit and humor. Ten o'clock and the group broke up.

"Have a drink, Quaint?"

"No — can't, pardner; thanks just the same," and Quaint sauntered up to the clerk's desk. Getting his key, he went to the elevator and ascended to his room. Once by himself he dropped into a chair, and could have moaned aloud. To his window he

walked, and gazed long and earnestly out at the sleepy old court-house, with its post-office nestling in the rear. Below was the glare of the arc lamps, above a sky full of stars. The loneliness of a traveling salesman is not a superficial loneliness. Quaint could have sat up all night, if he could have seen Foxy sail peacefully away in mid-heaven and enter the gates of paradise. Poor boy! his heart was right, his honor true, and he had hosts of friends, — and yet — the Parson did n't know what Foxy's fate might be. Quaint and Foxy had long been chums. Once Foxy was inclined to drink, but the strong will of Quaint had saved them both. Quaint would have liked to appear before Saint Peter in Foxy's behalf.

“Oh, well,” he sighed, “a stiff upper lip 's the thing. Getting the blues won't fetch him back, now will it?” and Quaint put the question to himself with a righteous tone of discipline.

Such dreams! But before dawn Quaint did get some refreshing sleep, then awoke in a calmer mood.


Fate was always kind to Quaint in his

extreme moments. The first concern he called upon was his mascot. The senior member met him smilingly.

“Have just been writing up an order to send in, and you can have it and welcome.” (How gracious some people can be when it is convenient!) Thirteen cases of Mill B tickings and four of denims.

Ordinarily an order of this kind would have pleased Quaint a good deal, but as he was at present feeling he took little heed of the number of cases, but pocketed the favor somewhat absently. Then he sauntered dreamily away and made his other two calls. Orders at both places, but these came not without a mere hint of persuasion on Quaint's part.

Train time. It was Friday, and to combat a popular superstition, Quaint freakishly resolved to do a most unusual thing. For once, even should he lose his grips by the means, he believed he would get his luggage carried over to the depot, and walk. If there was anything in the superstition that Friday is an unlucky day, why, something unusual would happen to him or his grips, see if it



would n't. So he summoned a son of Ham, — black as night was he, — and in easy time to reach the train for New York, he took up his half-mile walk.

Just inside the depot door a bustling crowd had gathered. Some object of curiosity was there, and Quaint with his off-hand freedom quickly elbowed his way to the center of the group. Sure enough, there in full view of a mob of helpless men, sat a modestly dressed woman, sobbing and clinging heroically to her babe.

"Stranded, I guess," remarked a bystander, seeing Quaint's eagerness.

"Pockets picked, maybe," suggested a second wise head.

"Gentlemen, make way, please," commanded Quaint, fairly bending his face down near that of the mother's. "What is the trouble, madam?"

A pair of doubting eyes looked up at the speaker, — eyes full of tears and helplessness. "I am sure I don't know what I shall do," she said, quite in dismay. "I have no money or friends in this horrible place — and my babe —"

Quaint grasped the situation in a twinkling. It may not have been quite manly of him, but he breathed a whisper in her ear.

"I'll befriend you. There, now, tone up, and we'll see what can be done."

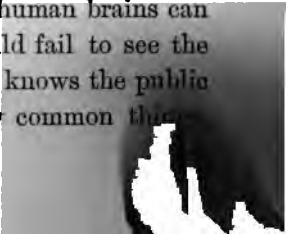
A hand touched Quaint upon his arm. An officer of the law.

"Relative of yours?"

Quaint was not to be baffled thus. "M-m, yes. We had the good luck to be born under the same roof." Then to the woman: "Let me hold your babe while you tell me how it happened."

But just then Quaint remembered that it was quite train time, and who knew but the darky had taken his luggage aboard. Surely, he had told him to, and some people will do as you tell them if it takes their breath. He had no more than got possession of the babe than this thought came to him. Yes, he even heard the hissing of the locomotive above.

Now, to appreciate what human brains can do, no freeborn citizen should fail to see the Hartford Depot. The Lord knows the public is easy enough befogged by common things.



but a place to handle people like this never could have been conceived by a mortal overstocked with sanity. Here is a stairway — leads to that train. Another stairway — leads to that train. A subterranean passage — leads to that train, or trains; and an Argus-eyed dromio is kept busy yelling which doorway or stairs to take to escape the vain-glorious act of going wrong. Of course our hero made a dash for the wrong stairway, the babe in his arms, three steps at a time. A high picket fence stood between him and his train, which was just ready to pull out.

“Hi, there! you black idiot; bring my grips back here!” Quaint stood close to the fence and was flourishing his hat and yelling desperately. The babe, frightened half to death, was also yelling and red in the face. “I say, there — pull that bell-rope! Tell the woolly devil I want my grips!”

Just then the sable visage of the negro appeared at the car door. He was looking supremely calm.

“Hi, there, Pompey! get my grips out of there! Do you hear?”

The conductor, about to wave his hand to the engineer, touched Pompey's arm.

"The fellow over yonder wants his grips. Quick, now!" and he fairly hustled the astonished darky back into the coach. Soon he reappeared with the grips.

"All aboard!" and instantly the train pulled out.

With an obliging grin Pompey sank slowly into the hatchway, and would possibly emerge in due time somewhere in the regions below. But the now frightened mother, having followed quickly up the stairs, was pulling at Quaint's arm, and a dozen interested spectators were battling to get through the door to witness the fun.

"Calm your fears, my dear madam. I was n't going to steal your babe. You see I came near losing my grips. But we are all right now, I guess." Then in a lower tone of voice: "If you will just be quiet a moment, I will try and do the fair thing by you," and with this he led the way down the stairs amid the sly jeers and laughter of the crowd.

Quaint still carried the babe, and no sooner

had they reached the room below than Pompey came grinningly up with the luggage. Dropping the babe into its mother's lap, Quaint turned a savage look at the porter.

"You are an infernal rascal, Pompey. Could n't understand a little plain English, eh? There, take that and vanish before I annihilate you!" and thrusting a half-dollar into his paw, Quaint condescended to take charge of his own baggage.

But his face softened when he turned again to the lady. He had previously asked to know her story, but had not waited to hear a word. Now he smiled beamingly down upon her with questions in both his eyes. The mother began speaking; but Quaint's quick mind forestalled her words, and though he only half heard what she said, he soon drank in the truth with a flash of understanding habitual with him in times of extreme happenings.

The annoying glances of the crowd, however, exasperated our hero beyond measure; his soul revolted at such rude treatment of 'a woman. What might he do? He was certainly master of the situation. Would

not his word be law in any event? One of his moments of swift decision came quickly upon him. Yes, he would get the mother and babe away from the depot, — anywhere, he thought, — and then he could offer to befriend her as a man of sense and sobriety should. A mere word to the mother, and an immediate course was agreed upon; it was the work of only a moment to call a hack, and for the driver to bundle the trio into his vehicle and turn his horses' heads uptown.

“To the City Hotel — quick, now!” and without a ghost of a thought as to how he was going to extricate himself from the dilemma, Quaint sank into the seat and stoutly held his tongue. The mother, woe-begone, but tremblingly confiding, buried her face in her kerchief and clung to her babe.

At the hotel door Quaint sprang out and gave a hand to his charge. “This way, please;” and up the stairs they went to the parlor above, but not until after Quaint had again taken charge of the babe. Somehow he had a troublesome liking for infantile flesh and blood. He looked quite fatherly.

“There, just stay here a minute until I

come back," and Quaint ran down to dismiss the carriage and get his grips. He took a bare moment to register.

"And the lady?" guessed the clerk, smilingly.

"Ah, yes; you see, it's a peculiar circumstance. I shall have to ask the lady her name. She will be here for the night, but I only for tea. Do you grasp it?"

A queer look came into the clerk's eye.

"Oh, that's all right. She and I were born under the same roof, so to speak."

"And you have forgotten her name?"

"Come, now, don't particularize — not just now," and Quaint planked down two silver dollars. "Give her the best room in the house. We will both be off on an early morning train, I reckon."

"Mystery!" proposed the clerk, clanking the two dollars together. But Quaint had disappeared upstairs. He would keep a weather eye out for this eccentric chap. With this resolve he turned the register around and read the name of his guest.

A sprightly youth, who, let it be known, had been an eye-witness at the depot, came

up to the desk just then. He scanned the register a moment.

“Crippen ; yes — curious fellow,” he mused to himself. He was night reporter for the “Courant.”

CHAPTER. V. .

“YOUR name, please?”

“Mrs. Eleanor Thorne.”

Quaint handed the lady his card and wrote her name on the back of another. As he looked up he made a discovery. It had never occurred to him that a forlorn mother of a babe, without money or friends, a castaway in a world of selfishness, could be pretty. Was it her eyes, or — why was she regarding him with a look of scrutiny? Her hair was disheveled, streaks of car dust and tears showed upon her cheeks; but out of a pair of large, earnest orbs she seemed to be asking him a question.

“I know you must think me rash, my dear lady, but circumstances compelled it. Please consider me most sincere in what I have done.”

The lady nodded, but kept her innocent eyes fixed upon Quaint. The babe was asleep (bless its happy helplessness!); and as the

moments flew by Quaint wondered what ordeal was next in store for him.

“Pardon me, Mr. Crippen” (her words had a mere hint of severity in them), “but did I not hear you say that we were born under the same roof?”

Here the man with money in his wallet was nearly checkmated. But be it said to his credit that he never flinched.

“Under one roof, certainly. A man like me, a wanderer of the earth, — why, the only roof he can call his own is the vaulted arch of heaven. It covers the rich; it shelters the poor. Has it not sheltered us both? Were we not indeed born under one roof?”

Quaint could never be poetical. In his stammering way he told her how absurd it would have been to have disclaimed relationship, when a mere resort to poetic license would release them both from curious eyes. Otherwise she might have spent the night in an almshouse instead of a hotel. He pleaded his case tolerably well for him. After another moment's gaze into Quaint's straightforward eyes, a shadowy smile crept upon her lips. This was a happy release for Quaint.

"Rather ingenious of you, really," she said, her former imperiousness vanishing like a summer frost. "I thank you, Mr. Crippen, most sincerely —"

"Oh, please don't mention it," begged Quaint, his sudden happiness making his temples grow hot. "I will run down and register for you. Your place of residence?"

"Greensward, Connecticut."

Quaint again sought the register and wrote the name of his charge next his own. A knight of old never did a prouder act. The inquisitive reporter stepped forward and read this second scrawl. Chuckling to himself, he left the hotel.

"Please send a housemaid to show the lady to her room," had been Quaint's only behest. He carried her little satchel up to the parlor and set it down beside her.

"Just thirty minutes to tea time," he said, referring to his watch. "I will have you shown to your room, and you can —" he did n't know just how to word it. He could n't tell her that her face was begrimed or that her hair was rumpled, so he stopped short and left the rest to woman's tact.

During Mrs. Thorne's absence Quaint took on a sober reflection. Had he ever been in so serious a plight before? Zounds! but how those pretty brown eyes danced before his vision! Could there be — was there such a thing as fate?

Presently a quiet step sounded upon the carpet. Quaint looked up. What a vision of perfect womanhood! The comely face was no longer tear-stained, the disheveled hair had disappeared to give place to the daintiest of ringlets, which cost so little, but mean so much. She had left the maid in her room to tend her babe, and now she came forward smiling a little sadly, but looking all the more attractive for it.

Quaint wondered if his own personal appearance warranted all this. He gallantly drew an easy-chair forward to the window and sat down to hear her story. It was a simple narrative, indeed. Married some years before, she had moved West, and settled. Her babe was but three months old when Mr. Thorne died, leaving her no other alternative than to return home as soon as arrangements could be perfected. Because of some prop-

erty interests, these arrangements took a whole year or more. Her mother lived in Greensward, and was of a well-to-do New England family. To her Mrs. Thorne had sent all her means, keeping only enough to pay her expenses home. While changing cars at Springfield her pocket-book was missing. Her baggage had been checked through, but her ticket had gone with her purse. As the train's next stop was Hartford, the conductor had permitted her to ride that far, when she was cast adrift. Her extreme fright at being thus forsaken accounted for her acts, which would Mr. Crippen please overlook, and try to believe her better prepared for the ills of life, which she surely was, of course.

Quaint watched the color come and go upon her cheeks, and his heart grew spasmodically violent in its beatings. It was indeed heaven to be thus able to serve some one, and that some one a woman who could look him steadily in the eye, trustfully, confidingly.

"Now, Mrs. Thorne," he remarked most generously, "I have heard your story, and you have my sympathies, of course. Will

you take my further help? Remember, we are strangers, but I can certainly serve you with the warmth of an old-time friend and neighbor. Happenings like this do not drop into a man's life every day. It would be little use for you to try to go farther to-night, so if you do not mind I want to ask you to stay here, make yourself comfortable, and permit me to work out a plan to see you safely home."

It may or it may not be a woman's province to obey, to trust, or to abide by the persuasive plea of a man, but there are frequently times when there seems no alternative at hand. So it was not strange that Quaint met with no marked opposition to his suggestion; and as the lady's accommodations were already paid for, was he not now master of the situation?

Tea time was quite forgotten until nearly all the other guests had left the table; so when they strolled in there were but few curious eyes to annoy them. But Quaint could scarcely have been annoyed. He had a way of slighting the inquisitive eye and tongue of the world, by being himself. Pos-

sibly destiny might keep him from committing any serious blunders; if not, his rule was to make the most of them as they found him.

At the tea table their talk ran most agreeably along. Mrs. Thorne, more intuitively, perhaps, than otherwise, found it pleasant to trust her protector implicitly. Quaint was charmed. All this had come about when his heart was aching for sensation, — when his great soul was longing for some desperate happening.

In the parlor they sat and talked until late, the babe having been brought in and lay sleeping on an easy-chair. Though it jarred upon his enjoyment to descend to mundane things, Quaint was obliged to broach the subject of their departure in the morning.

“Train leaves for Greensward at five-fifteen,” he explained, with his usual exactness about trains. “I will put up at the same hotel I did last night, and will meet you here with a carriage at four-forty sharp. Will you be ready?”

Mrs. Thorne began a word of thanks.

“Please don’t hint at gratitude, I beg of you. I only ask that—I only wish you—

to trust me—that is all. You will not object to my seeing you safely home?”

“If it is not too much out of your way,” agreed Mrs. Thorne, with the frank countenance which becomes a woman of sense.

It was eleven o'clock when, ambling along up Main Street with his two grips, Quaint was again a star-gazer; but not with the same feelings as on the night before. His grief had turned to excessive joy. He gave not one thought as to his right to be happy. The style of life he lived had taught him to follow his moods much the same as he did his vocation, — for what they were worth. Children do this; but few of us are children and sages at one and the same time.

CHAPTER VI.

IT was the identical room at the hotel which Quaint had occupied the night previous. To the window he strode and looked out. The placid old court-house seemed to smile beneath its gables. The stars winked knowingly down at him, and the Big Dipper seemed to be turning a handspring for joy.

When he put out his gas he hid his face deep in his pillow, and smiled. Those grateful, trusting eyes into which he had been looking all the evening, haunted him even in the darkness. The words of her whom he had befriended had a measure of real heaven in them. What a deucedly queer circumstance all around, now was n't it? Quaint marveled at the spryness with which he had acted. But it had all come about so perfectly natural, he reasoned, and he felt sure that had he planned it out there would have been a hitch somewhere.

In the midst of these thoughts Quaint wished he could fall asleep before the time should come for the porter to call him. But sleep for a time was out of the question. Yet he must have had a nap or two when a loud rap upon his door caused him to spring from the bed. He was now terribly sleepy, but he called out, "All right!" from habit, then looked at his watch. It was four-fifteen — and now for business!

The carriage already stood at the hotel door, and as soon as he had paid his bill, Quaint stepped into the vehicle and was driven rapidly away.

At the other hotel a sleepy night clerk was nodding behind the desk. Up the stairs Quaint mounted to the parlor. A small, feeble gaslight filled the room, but true to the test there sat mother and babe, quite ready and waiting. A smile of the deepest gratitude was the happy greeting Quaint received. It made his big heart thump right royally. Down the stairs they went, Quaint carrying both babe and valise, and very like a happy family did they look, indeed. The night clerk had by this time sauntered out and

stood grinning and sleepy. When the carriage sped down the street he turned and resumed his doze behind the desk.

Quaint had barely time to purchase his two tickets and a morning paper when the clanging locomotive came rumbling in. Very, very warily did he go up the right stairway this time, for now it was a case of deliberate intent all around. Never did he mount a car step with a firmer tread. When he took the pretty feminine hand in his — their first personal contact — a thrill of intensity possessed him. There was a certain elasticity in her touch, a trustful, delightful dependence, which the bountiful-hearted man loves so well.

No sooner had Quaint got the mother and babe safely cared for, than he looked around him. Two roguish eyes he saw in the rear of the coach. A familiar hand beckoned to him.

"Lem Gabbetz, as I live," mused Quaint to himself. "Hello, Lem! Where are you going?" But a knowing grin had overspread the features of the Jew. His squatty figure seemed to be overrun with wriggling

mirth. Quite confidentially he drew Quaint down and whispered in his ear.

"How vos your seester, eh?"

"Sister?—you've got me there, Lem. What is your racket, anyway?" But the Jew wriggled and twisted more than ever.

"Doan you haf seen the morning paper, eh?"

An idea struck Quaint. Before he could pull his paper from his pocket Gabbetz held his own up to Quaint. There it was in black and white, — scare headlines, — and his own name the most prominent of all: — "A startling coincidence! Quaint Crippen, a well-known Boston drummer, finds his sister stranded in the Hartford Depot. Some delightfully queer antics. A former belle of Greensward the heroine. Full particulars of the event," etc., etc., and then followed a graphic account of the happening, with four-fifths added of purest fiction.

Quaint flushed for once. Here was a pretty mess. And what would Chippy and his blueblood partner say now? Yes, and what fiendishly awkward things do sometimes drop into the lot of man! The Argus eyes

of the Jew were fairly dancing with delight. But a mere wail from the babe aroused Quaint from his stupor of surprise. Let the world come to an end if it would, but he could n't hear that child cry for one blessed moment. In a twinkle he was bending over the widow's seat in anxious inquiry. But the mother had mysteriously hushed the wail, — as mothers do, — so she raised her eyes and gave her escort a look of womanly appreciation, which Quaint drank in with supreme happiness. He turned over a seat facing the pair, and lest he might intrude he found a place for his grips, then strolled back to talk with Gabbetz.

“ Hang that reporter, anyway ! ” he grinned rather fiercely, after he had glanced through the item.


“ An' vos it trooly your seester ? ” chuckled the Jew, most provokingly.

“ Oh, go on, Lem ; that won't wash. Some blear-eyed pencil-pusher put that in. But who could have given him the tip about a sister, anyway ? ” and Quaint stared the Jew into soberness. “ Oh — to be sure — ” then Quaint thought a moment. To be born

under the same roof would make her his sister, would n't it? Then Quaint smiled — then frowned. He seemed not to care so much about himself, but that the name of a lady of the first rank should be dragged into the scrape, — that was contemptible. He could have strangled an average reporter just then. And would n't the yarn travel fleet-footed everywhere? Quaint wondered if it would.

Presently he saw that the babe was cared for and sleeping, so he went forward and with his overcoat made a bed upon the front seat. With the tenderest of saintly devotion the mother laid her infant down and covered it with a blanket. When this was done, Quaint dropped into the seat beside the widow quite like an overly devoted parent.

It was now broad daylight, the sun was peeping over the hilltops; and as the train dashed on the sleepy passengers began to awake and stare about them. Yet Quaint saw naught beside two great lustrous eyes; heard naught but sweetly measured words, which came frankly forth in reply to his own. If Quaint thought at all, he must



have feared that the trip was going to be all too short.

Suddenly he was aware that Mrs. Thorne was regarding him with a studious look of inquiry. How her very eyes seemed to talk, really!

"Mr. Crippen," she at length said, but with a slight embarrassment, "would you mind answering a question about yourself?"

"Certainly not," assured Quaint. He had thus far thought himself a poor subject for inquiry.

"Your generosity and attentiveness lead me to believe that you are married."

"Thanks for the compliment," stammered Quaint; "but I am not. By the way, though, are married men usually attentive?"

"Some are," she said, a little sadly. "My husband was most devoted and painstaking."

"Oh, yes," thought Quaint; "such men never do live long." Then he said aloud: "And you must have many pleasant memories to recall, I am sure."

Mrs. Thorne was looking dreamily out of the window. A shadow had flitted across her features. What an interesting crea-

ture for study! Quaint's warm heart would gladly have taken on any measure of her grief had he been able. But he was happy now, — extremely, audaciously happy. Had any chance acquaintance of mortal man ever looked prettier? The perfect pink of her cheeks — delicate, to be sure — but pink withal; and when she smiled, what winning, even charming depths came into her trustful gaze!

But Quaint must improve his time. “Mrs. Thorne,” he said, “while speaking of serious things, I have a question to ask you, as well. Two days since I left a chum of mine to die. Big, noble, generous-hearted boy he once was, honest to a fault, and a traveling man like myself. He may be at this very moment knocking at the gates of heaven for admission. Foxy and I were one, as it were, and I would much rather he had lived, but his cough was terrible. Neither time nor tide would wait, so I had to tear myself away and leave him to die alone with his broken-hearted mother. Yes, Foxy was doomed from the first of his sickness, I guess,” and Quaint now spoke half musingly.

“But to come to the point at once. My question is this: Do you suppose Foxy will find a place among the saved? Grave doubts get into my mind sometimes; even the Parson don’t know, and if he does n’t, who does?”

Down into the depths of those wondrous eyes Quaint looked, earnestly, longingly. He saw there a gleam of the rarest compassion.

“Saved? Most surely he will be saved,” she said, with a smile that would have won a lost soul from perdition. “Heaven is not a far-away dream, but a condition merely. You say your friend was honest. If honest, then he found a heaven even here on earth; can he be denied as much hereafter?”


“Heaven here on earth, — do you mean it?”

“Certainly. Think a moment. Heaven is here, there, and everywhere. You are as much in heaven now as you ever will be. All you can do more than now is to fit yourself to comprehend a greater degree of heaven, — more of what goes to make up heaven to the inner, sublimer man. I believe that earth was intended for a heaven from the beginning.”

A conviction, quick and subtle, mounted to Quaint's brain, and beat against his temples. Was he not in heaven surely? How much, indeed, might a mortal live in one brief moment! Somehow his longings had been ministered unto, speedily and mysteriously, for not a doubt of the dying man's salvation remained. What magic to be thus persuaded! But it was the truth, for Quaint had caught it more with his heart than with his head.

Just then a pause dropped into their talk. The train was pulling into New Haven. Past the smoke-begrimed blocks they spun, the whirling dust pelting the windows of the car now somber with flitting shadows. In a moment more the train pulled up at the depot and stopped. A sonorous, snatchy voice sounded at the rear door of the coach, and Quaint smiled at the suddenness of the changes which are wont to come over the dreams of travelers.

"Ham sandwiches! chicken lunches! bananas, and jelly rolls!" The broad-featured darky, with voice musical but monotonous, was moving forward with a huge basket lifted in front of him.



“Now,” said Quaint, coming suddenly back to earth, “our opportunity has arrived;” and with the word he spread his newspaper down upon the seat between them. From the plenteous basket he selected a dainty lunch, the sight of which had already put a keen edge to his appetite. His companion watched him with a smile of amusement. She may never have been associated with people who could thus readily adapt themselves to every shade of happenings. Quaint was ready trained to just that sort of life.

CHAPTER VII.

QUAINT had quite forgotten about the presence of the Jew until, in looking out of the car window, he saw him upon the depot platform. He had left the train, and, catching Quaint's eye, he waved a parting adieu to him, his sly glance and perpetual grin suggesting no end of good-natured suspicion and raillery.

"My friend Gabbetz," explained Quaint, helping himself to a sandwich. "Boston is full of such as he — and Chinamen, and pugilists, and heresies to boot. But I love dear old Boston. Were you ever there?"

"Only once, when quite young."

"Then you have never experienced the lot of him who gets lost in the midst of a dense population. Those streets — and those very angles. They radiate, and then they don't radiate. Then they come to sudden halts before your eyes, and when a denizen of the

Hub undertakes to set you right, you must look him straight in the eye, for if you miss a single link in his narrative you are lost again."

Quaint's listener smiled. She was enjoying both the lunch and the talk.

"By the way, though, Mrs. Thorne, where did you get your convictions?" Mrs. Thorne looked up questioningly. "I mean your ideas of heaven. Does it require a Western climate to develop such?"

"I can almost imagine that a stay in the West does help to build up one's spiritual vision," she said approvingly.

"Yet the heresies of the East are remarkably numerous," guessed Quaint.

"Mostly of the head, are they not? An intellectual heresy is altogether harmless."

"But a heresy of the heart?"

"That of the heart, when understood, gives promise of the coming of the true Christian era. I do not know where I got these thoughts. When a mere child I used to chafe under literal interpretations. Whenever I could get out into the woods I looked upon Nature as a revelation. I did not care

because the trees were not all alike, or because the birds sang different songs. I loved the birds and the trees just the same."

Quaint was charmed. Here were his own views given back to him from the sweetest of lips. It is something to be ministered unto, but if the mind or the heart of him who listens be not ready, the saintliest words can be spoken in vain.

In another hour the journey to Greensward would be ended. This villa, but a short distance out of New York, lay overlooking the Sound, and had been the home of Mrs. Thorne from childhood. As they passed the familiar landmarks, old memories began crowding in, and Mrs. Thorne at times fell to musing. In the midst of one of her reveries her babe awoke, with the daintiest smile upon its tiny face. Catching the infant to her bosom, the mother showered loving caresses upon its pretty self. Quaint looked on, extremely pleased and philosophical. Was this not heaven for them all? When it is possible to enjoy truly and sacredly the happiness of another, the healthy vibrations of the soul are present, every time. When we assume

a pleasure merely, better by far to banish the thought.

"And mother will be so worried because I did not come last night," remarked Mrs. Thorne. "But it will be all right, for everything comes to those who wait."

"Everything?" spoke Quaint, a little absently.

"All that belongs to them, I mean."


"Oh, surely," he sighed. He was at this moment wondering how Mrs. Thorne's parent might take this oddest of happenings.

The lunch had been cleared away, the babe's eyes glistened in the morning sun, when the brakeman called out the stopping-place, which was yet some two miles from Greensward. Motioning to a porter, Quaint had his own luggage carried into the depot and checked, while he still supplied the place of helpmeet to the widow.

Down the old familiar road they went, the noisy rumbling of the carriage in marked contrast with the recent monotonous whir of the cars. A certain silvery brook was crossed, into whose depths Mrs. Thorne looked dreamily.

“In that stream we children used to wade and gather pebbles,” she explained, and Quaint let his glance fall upon the shimmering current with the happiest appreciation. He had been contemplating the distant shadowy banks of Long Island, and the dancing waves of salt water between. Now the tiny brook had a thousand charms the most.

A pretty old-fashioned manor, its gables covered with vines, a hedge winding itself around a broad inclosure, which, like a moss-covered mantle, lay slanting up the hillside, — this was the home of Mrs. Rachel Stillman, the widow of one of Connecticut's early residents. The carriage drew up before a rude swinging gate set in between two stone abutments, — a permanent, homely gate, but as dear to the eye of her who swung upon it in childhood as lasting memories could make it. On the door an ancient knocker, veranda scoured and spotless, cozy windows set deep into the stone walls of the house, exposing the cheery lace curtains and polished glass, — all these Quaint drank in at a glance as he mounted the steps, babe in arms and valise



at his side, generous and heartily willing to the last.

Fairly bounding into the hallway, Mrs. Thorne led the way through the door without knocking.

“Mother!”

“Why, Eleanor!” and mother and daughter were in each other’s embrace in an instant. Mrs. Stillman, yet beautiful in her advanced years, had arisen from her reading, out of which she had been suddenly startled.

Quaint’s trained eye took in every look and act, and though he had set the valise down in the hallway, he stood in mute raptures holding the babe.

“My friend Mr. Crippen, of Boston,” Eleanor struggled to say between her mother’s smothering caresses. She did not help Quaint’s embarrassment much when she took the babe from him and fairly tossed it into her parent’s arms. Grandma’s excess of delight was immediately transferred to her precious burden, of course, for this was the first time she had beheld the infant in flesh and blood. Up from the child’s face she at length glanced, in reply to her daughter’s words.


Some strange look of conflict had come upon her face. Eleanor stood smiling her regards for Quaint, while the latter advanced and took Mrs. Stillman's hand. Some chill as of a slight distance made their handshake anything but cordial. For courage Quaint looked beseechingly into Mrs. Thorne's face, and instantly her eyes flashed back a reply. With the most womanly reserve Mrs. Stillman set a chair for Quaint, which he took a little doubtfully.

"I am under a thousand obligations to Mr. Crippen," Eleanor hastened to say. "I had a dreadful mishap at Springfield, and to Mr. Crippen do I owe my presence here even now."

"A mishap? Tell me — were you robbed?"

"Precisely that. But let me get my breath, please, and then you shall know more about it;" and becoming instantly absorbed in removing the babe's outer garments, the grandmother for the moment grew warm and devoted again.

Quaint could not have guessed but that, all things considered, he would be greeted as a thrice welcome guest. He must have



flushed a little, but in all charity he tried to become interested in the speech of two women who would insist on both talking at once. In a few moments Mrs. Stillman had a mere inkling of what her daughter had passed through.

"We are most certainly quite grateful to Mr. Crippen," she said, as if so timely a favor should not go unrewarded, at least.

"I assure you, Mrs. Stillman, that my services have been most cheerfully offered. I trust I have only acted the part of a gentleman." Quaint could be formal, too, when driven to it.

But the correctness with which he spoke seemed to undo the rigidity of Mrs. Stillman's countenance a trifle. Drawing a chair cozily forward, Mrs. Thorne sat down to explain fully how it had all come about. In this she proved herself an able narrator, for some incidents she remembered which Quaint had quite forgotten.

It was not of course the correct thing to stay longer than lunch hour at the farthest, though the thought of terminating an acquaintance so rudely filled Quaint with a sudden

dread. It was Saturday; and where indeed ought he to pass the time until Monday? These stray musings began running through his mind as he sat and listened to the talk.

"And now, mamma," concluded Eleanor, "my wish is that Mr. Crippen be our guest for to-morrow." This with a questioning nod at Quaint. What wondrous tact! He believed she possessed a wizard's insight.

An early lunch was served in the neatest old-fashioned New England dining-room, with the quaintest silver and dishes, and as Mrs. Stillman, with her pretty lace cap and gold-bowed spectacles, poured the tea, Quaint witnessed the formal exactnesses of his aged hostess grow gradually less, but not until the talk had drifted into more familiar channels. More than once was Mrs. Stillman's circum-spect glance fixed upon her guest, when in an unguarded moment he would let slip one of his off-hand remarks. But at such times her daughter would instantly broach some other subject, and so distract her fond parent's attention.

But how dreadfully circumscribed can a conversation become when there is a third

person present. It was Quaint's belief that people should go alone or in pairs, for humanity's sake. Once he mentioned the sunny state of the weather, and Mrs. Stillman filled in several minutes upon this subject very much to her credit. Yet the distance did not altogether dissolve, and when it came time to go, Quaint believed he would have given a round sum for one blessed moment alone with Mrs. Thorne. But this was a privilege wholly out of the question, so he was obliged to affect a spurious indifference, that he might appear well-bred, if only for the sake of making a favorable impression.

CHAPTER VIII.

DOWN the old highway tramped Quaint, to a point where he could board a horse-car for the station. He was in no hurry, but somewhat idly did he note the picturesque landscapes, the scattering, quiet old cottages set in here and there in neighborly contrast with the rusty ledges of rock cropping out of the hillsides, the many little rivulets oozing from moss-covered ledges, and forming pretty pools of stagnant water, which might have existed for a hundred years or more undisturbed, — all these and more beside did Quaint look upon, now with a spirited, buoyant mood, now with a longing, unsatisfied air, as if all things had not come about just as he could have wished.

“And the dear old parent—how exquisitely respectable! and how desperately does she cling to her altogether out-of-date notions of propriety!” he was forced to say of

pure defense. "Why did n't she wring my hand and call me a hero, and adore me, and shower fitting congratulations upon me for having posed for once as a valorous gentleman? or do or say something to put a little warmth into one? Yes, I say, why did n't she, sure enough?"

Quaint had paused and was gazing down into a clear running brook which babbled along by the roadside. Half mechanically he stooped and picked therefrom a curious crimson stone, which he turned over admiringly.

"A pretty pocket-piece," thought he; "or, what is better, I will have the thing worked over into a watch-charm in remembrance of — whom? oh, of the babe, maybe — no harm in that, is there?" and again Quaint began weighing the propriety of even so petty a trifle as this.

Reaching town, he sought out the best hotel, and registered. What a dreadfully tedious afternoon it was! Once in his strollings he passed a store having large mirrors in the windows. Half forgetfully he halted and looked within. In the midst of his

reflections he saw the intruding image of himself. A derisive smile crept upon his face.

"Pshaw! Quaint, that beastly necktie will never do," he chided himself, quite lavishly. "I wonder if the widow noticed it?" He actually felt a little crestfallen.

Into an adjoining store he stepped and bought a tie of better taste. And that hat, — no, that would n't do, either. So he bought a new hat. When he had donned these two purchases, together with a standing collar, he took a critical look at himself in the glass. That was better; and yet — his coat was slightly out of date — he believed if he could get fitted he would invest a little farther.

"There!" he at last declared, quite audaciously. "If that does n't meet the old lady's fancy of what a perfect gentleman is, I shall go forever out of the business."

While waiting for his change, he drolly compared his new outfit with that worn by the painted-faced dummy in the doorway.

"If I could pose like that, I presume I could pass for a Puritan outright, — or a

man angel, perhaps, which is one and the same thing in these parts. Smile? — no, not a smile. Wrinkle in his pants? — no, not a wrinkle. Great Scott! that is the ideal man for you. However,” — and Quaint stared doubtingly out upon the street, — “wait until to-morrow;” and he waited, of course, but not with the most laudable patience, you may be sure. Even now he was longing for just one word more with his pretty friend, the widow, — she with pearly teeth and bewitching smile and magnificent philosophies. Who could have believed that such a woman existed?

Sunday came, of course, for the earth had turned once more upon its axis, and the almanac-makers had decreed it Sunday quite unanimously. The day was perfect. Quaint started early, for he wished to make the entire distance to Greensward on foot.

It might have been ten o'clock when he opened the creaking gate and glanced a little hesitatingly up at the Stillman cottage. His expectant pulse was throbbing more rapidly than he could have wished — but why? The rude knocker sounded irreverently loud

in the midst of such perfect peace and quiet. When the door swung noiselessly open, and she of his imagery stood holding the knob, Quaint's heart gave a sudden bound. What perfect loveliness! From the worn traveler of the day before had come forth a being to admire, — most assuredly to admire, — as men do who are taken unawares in moments of extreme doubting. Dressed in her black lace wrapper and dainty slippers, a mere rosebud at her throat, a delicate petal in her hair, — no ornaments save these, — it can be imagined that when Quaint pressed the widow's outstretched hand he was possessed through and through with an ecstatic mood of some kind. Was it possible that she was thus radiantly expecting him? or was she also agreeably impressed with his own improved appearance? He had no time to ask himself even these. He was shown into a cozily furnished parlor, across which the mellow sunshine crept with warmth and friendliness. Quaint had for the moment forgotten his sense of strict propriety, and in his profuse way betrayed his admiring glances without stint. Woman that she was,

after all, she might excuse even these, all things considered.

"I cannot tell you how thankful I am to reach home," she said, with a smile sweet and womanly. "Mother is so happy, and Sister Alice — you did not see Sister Alice yesterday, did you? Sister has grown to be a lovely girl, and she is overjoyed at my coming, too. Mother seems to have found her perfect oneness in Baby Ruth. Home, after all, is a kingdom of itself."

"And Baby Ruth is the imperious monarch of all she surveys, of course," guessed Quaint, with fitting acquiescence.

Quaint's impressions were good. He could not have told just why, but for some reason there seemed to be a changed atmosphere in the Stillman cottage. It is not an uncommon lot for us all to feel, when we enter a home not our own, the extent of our welcome. If truly welcome, our words come forth more cheerily, our hearts fill up with good feeling, and we go right to visiting without the need of so many formalities.

In the midst of the talk Mrs. Stillman appeared, half leading a buxom lass of per-

haps sixteen or over. Quaint saw that a gleam of secret enjoyment lurked in the matron's bright blue eyes. Her lace cap and spectacles looked less circumspect, and she actually took her caller's hand with a degree of cordiality.

"This is my daughter Alice, Mr. Crippen," she said, using the simplest form of expression.

Quaint must have betrayed his admiration for the splendid color upon the maiden's cheeks. The modest drooping of her head and her shy glances filled him with a sort of generous ecstasy.

At this moment Mrs. Thorne was called out of the room to see to her babe, and, as young girls do, Miss Alice managed to creep away as soon as manners would permit. Quaint viewed the situation with alarm, but in a word Mrs. Stillman put him more at ease.

"It is very kind of you to come out again, Mr. Crippen," she said. "I am sure we hardly did justice to ourselves yesterday. I was afraid something might happen to detain you."

"I could not easily have declined your invitation, I am sure," replied Quaint, barely knowing what to say. A slight trace of feeling had begun to show upon the features of his hostess. Had he spoken just the right words? He waited breathlessly to know.

"You will please pardon me," she said, with some effort, "but would you kindly tell me the amount you have expended in my daughter's behalf?"

Quaint felt instantly forlorn. He had verily believed this emergency would never arrive. Must he, indeed, be called upon to account for a paltry sum of money, as a measure for what he had done? He had some little tact, and, fortunately, he chose the easier course. He would not deny the claim, for that might lead to hostilities.

"I will get you a slip of paper," said Mrs. Stillman, seeing Quaint's hesitation. But Quaint drew his own memorandum book from his pocket and made a feint to put down some figures.

"It is n't much," he said, as he tore out the leaf. Mrs. Thorne had just then quietly

entered the room, and was standing at his side. It was she who took the paper.

"And the lunch at New Haven?" she exacted.

"Oh, maybe — yes," stammered Quaint.

"And the carriage from the station?"

"Didn't I get that in?" asked Quaint, in all innocence.

"Let me see — what else is there?"

"Nothing — nothing at all," parried Quaint. Bless her generous heart! How queenly she looked, knitting her brows in study! But Quaint had soon quite forgiven the exactness of the transaction, so singularly just did it seem, after all. Mrs. Stillman took the paper and soon after retired from the room. It was her duty to superintend the dinner, which doubtless was to be a little elaborate, as New England dinners often are.

"Now, Mr. Crippen," said the junior widow, sitting down upon a stool quite informally, "I hope you won't object to being shown over our house and grounds, for I know you can appreciate all there is to see. Both Alice and I were born and raised right here, and it will do my heart good to go over

the place once more. You see we Connecticut people have a penchant for calling up early recollections."

Would he go with her? What an unbounded privilege to accord a mere individual like himself! In very truth she needed only to say the word, and he would follow her to the ends of the earth. They explored the grounds first.

Down a pretty path they went, — a path bordered with ridges of gravel and hedges of roses; up rocky places and over two or three purling brooks which wound hither and yon across the premises, until at last they reached a sequestered arbor in a remote part of the grounds. Here they found seats, which they took with one accord.


"Father was living then," Mrs. Thorne was saying, a little sadly. "Right here we dressed our dolls, and played house, and brother Ralph, who now lives in the West, was the most mannerly little fellow in the neighborhood. He was a very fit playmate for us children. How vividly it all comes back to me now!"

As she spoke, a look of saintliness stole

upon her features. Quaint had listened with rapt attention, as if he had caught the very spirit of all she had said.

“Do you see that very old tree yonder by the wall? Well, it is a fact that in that very tree I first saw my husband. He was a mere lad then, but he was as full of his pranks as you please. My older sister and I were strolling along, drawing our dolls on a couple of improvised carts, when all of a sudden a small pebble struck Ella’s doll and bounded against my hand. Looking up, we saw the mischievous face of a boy peering down at us, out of the thick foliage of the tree. How he came there and who he was we could not conjecture. Taking instant fright, we turned and ran as if from a spook. You see the Thornes had moved into the neighborhood but a short time before, and this somewhat roving member of the family had doubtless climbed the tree and was sitting there idling the time away. Strange, was n’t it, that he should have become my husband?”

“We can hardly size up the future by present circumstances,” philosophized Quaint, though he believed he had known older fem-



inine hearts than the sisters' then were to be even looking for their mates in by-places as well as in teacups. However, he was not quite well enough acquainted as yet to put this thought into words.

From the grounds they strolled into the house and upstairs to a sort of tower-like annex of very ancient design, which overlooked the Sound. A short flight of stairs led from here into a roomy garret, in which scores of aged trophies of other days were stored.

"Here we played school on stormy Saturdays, all in blissful ignorance that the weather was anything but pleasant outside," stated Mrs. Thorne, sitting down upon a rude bench beside a dilapidated spinning-wheel.

Quaint with masterly negligence put himself astride an old shoemaker's horse, and crossed his two arms above the wooden clamp, across which many a waxed end had doubtless been drawn scores of years before. In the mere moment of silence he cast a curious glance about him. Verily, it was like looking back into primitive times to behold the many silent witnesses of the industry of other days, strewn here and there about the room.

He examined the marks of time upon several articles near him. Had a cobbler actually lived to partake of the line of ancestry of the Stillman cottage? Bless his dear old heart! At all events he must certainly have been a highly honored member of a family so devoted to things lovable.

“What inglorious punishments we used to inflict!” at last mused Mrs. Thorne, with a pitying smile. “Imitative children follow closely the examples set them by their elders, and of course you know that paying some penalty or other was half of one’s schooling in those days. I was frequently teacher, and I remember Alex Thorne once incurred my displeasure; and do you know, I actually decreed that he should stand on tiptoe and touch yonder spot on the rafter for a whole five minutes. Why, Alex would no more have dared to disobey me —”

“Ah, yes — afterwards you were married; then it was different,” interposed Quaint, somewhat felicitously.

A strange, almost puzzled smile flitted across his listener’s face, and she looked at him steadily a moment.

"But go on, please," he begged, instantly sorry that he had attempted any levity. "You were lovers, married or unmarried, of course," he said, now more seriously.

Mrs. Thorne let her glance fall a moment in silence. "Yes, and we were happy," she said. "But it makes life seem so unreal and dreamlike. Can any of us say that it was not all to have been? I sometimes wish that human existence might be had for the asking."

The old spinning-wheel began slowly turning around under the speaker's delicate touch. Now the semblance of a quiet, even holy sadness had come upon her features, usually so bright and alluring. Quaint watched the wheel turn silently on, as if it might, by turning backward, undo the past. But no, he did not believe in impossible things.

Thus several minutes of peaceful silence sped by, during which some comforting mutual response seemed passing between them. Quaint could not have explained just how he realized this, but, with his abundant relish for things human, he, as usual, drank in his friend's words more with his heart

than with his head. Had he the power to express himself in cultured phrases, he would have done so instantly. But he was not a man of words for the sake of effect.

"Existence — yes," he at length agreed, smiling hopefully. "But we should scarcely know what to ask for, even then. Some parts of humanity do not exist; they merely move about because their forefathers did the same before them. During your brief married life you lived the best you knew; take credit for that, at least. What more can you ask?"

Mrs. Thorne's face was a study for an instant. "That the way still to live be opened before me," she said slowly and dispassionately. As she said it, her lips pressed themselves together slightly.

Quaint winced a little. Were not his homely philosophies sufficient to cope with hers? What had she back of all this? The spinning-wheel, now no longer urged into motion, stopped, and the stillness became most intense.

"My dear woman!" presently ejaculated Quaint, a world of fine frenzy having mounted to his brain, "have we not all a future? Yours may be one of happiness yet."

"I give no thought to that. Happiness, as a rule, comes to us unbidden. To be so awakened that I can interpret life ought to be my one desire."

"And love is not dead to you?" he asked impulsively.

"Love is immortal; why should it be?"

"I know—yes, I know," bridled Quaint. His very soul was overflowing with admiration for her who had spoken thus wisely. The depth of her insight was every moment more of a discovery to him. With impulse he arose and took a seat beside her upon the bench. She gave him a trustful look of inquiry. Quaint answered it with a gaze of fullest rapture.

"Do you know, Mrs. Thorne," he said, "that your philosophies have the deepest meaning for me. This may be no place to carry on a discussion, but will you tell me truly of what life consists?—I mean, what was the one great cause which put us here and gave us breath?"

"Love!—the all-pervading love of Him who spoke the universe into being. We cannot escape that. The more of heaven we

have within us, the more of the universal love is ours."

A remarkable conviction came rushing in upon Quaint, the same as when they had their previous talk upon the train. Somewhat rashly he essayed to take her hand in his, but she permitted him to hold it for a moment only. But during that moment he said hurriedly, —

"It may have been Fate which made us friends. Fate, then, must decide if it is just. One word more, please, before we go. I shall value our friendship above all else on earth. You have already let light into my soul, and I thank you for it. I may be scarcely worthy of it, perhaps, but I shall profit by it, rest assured. Our acquaintance must not end with to-day's happenings. May I visit you again?"

"Yes," she said merely. There was a world of womanly decision in the word as she said it, and Quaint eagerly drank in its fullest significance. Then as if to break the spell of seriousness which had fallen upon them, she arose and led the way once more downstairs, and this time out among the patches of flowers and fragrant shrubbery.

CHAPTER IX.

AND such a dinner! The old dining-room fairly shone with radiant good-will. Quaint had a theory which he had never breathed to any one. As we already know, he had a mother once, and her cooking Quaint believed excelled all other cooking by great odds. After he had grown older, and when he had only the memory of his good mother left him, he set out to discover why every happy-hearted fellow was so sure that *his* mother's cooking was the best. Into households he occasionally went where true love reigned; then, again, he would be obliged to take a meal where everything was not so lovable. He observed that after eating at the former place his food digested better. Out of this and other like observations he evolved a belief; namely, that she who lives in an atmosphere of good-will, of love and harmony, actually kneads an element of sweetness into

her bread and pastry, and that she can impart to her cooking generally something that makes it more digestible. And this belief must have found a ready support with Quaint, traveler that he was, eating of the chillingly barren hotel foods, and going to bed nightly wishing he were a boy again. We say Quaint never breathed this notion to any one, for somehow such flitting fancies seemed more real when left unspoken. But he pitied the unfortunate people who live unhappily. Dyspepsia is ever alert for him or her who eats of inharmonies.

A pretty lace mantle drawn primly about her neck and shoulders, a perfect-fitting cap with traces of cream satin in its crown, and a garnet cluster at her throat, set off the still lovable personality of Quaint's aged hostess. Mrs. Stillman, conscientiously exact in all she undertook, seemed quite aware of the success of her one Sunday meal, which still holds its own in New England. Quaint and his younger hostess had strolled from place to place about the premises, until it became necessary for them to be called, so deeply had they become absorbed in higher things.

But when Quaint glanced over the well-filled table, a somewhat tardy thought came to him relative to the parable of the bread cast upon the waters, etc., and had he been permitted the remark, he would have affirmed that his had very quickly returned to him, and that it must surely be tempered with sweetness, and therefore must prove highly digestible.

A rarest look of inner composure was visible in Eleanor Thorne's face, which, had her parent not been so absorbed in her tale, she might readily have discovered. Alice had kindly volunteered to take the babe out for an airing, and thus the arrangements for dinner had been admirably planned.

Mrs. Stillman had just ventured a few facts concerning the early days of Connecticut, and the customs which were in vogue when she was a child.

"Were you raised in this State, Mr. Crippen?" she asked.

"I was born in Massachusetts; my early home was in Norwood."

"I want to know! I once had a cousin who lived in Norwood. The Crippens I knew were Vermont people."

“Another branch of the family,” explained Quaint, quite readily. “Our family was peculiar. There was a goodly crop of us, and so far as I can remember — of uncles, aunts, cousins and the like — they were all a good-natured set, and could smile even at catechism. My father was an energetic sort of man who never did anything by halves. He was a coroner.”

Mrs. Stillman looked up with a puzzled stare, and her daughter smiled quietly.

“Mother could sing us boys to sleep and would read us stories and make us toe the mark with a vengeance. I don’t know that she ever used a whip on one of us.”

“Indeed!” murmured Mrs. Stillman. “But was she never severe?”

“Only once — to me — and that was when I let on at a table full of company that we had borrowed knives and forks. She seemed severe this way; she gave me a look that cut me to the quick, and never, never did I commit such an indiscretion again.”

On Mrs. Stillman’s face had crept a look almost of parental pride for her guest. No mother who had reared a family of children

could have failed to imbibe the true inwardness of his words, so fondly had he spoken them.

"Home has the making of us all," suggested Eleanor, in filial tones. She had told Quaint so much of her early life that no further remark from her seemed necessary.

Can it be wondered at that Quaint ate heartily upon this occasion? Those splendid home-made biscuits, which fairly melt in one's mouth; the delicious preserves, the potatoes stirred to a creamy whiteness and seasoned to perfection, — these and much else, to say nothing of the selectness of the company he was in, made the event for him a memorable one. He would have liked to praise everything, but his sense of propriety forbade. So he merely ate with a wholesome relish, which, after all, is a cook's most flattering indorsement.

"Your contact with the world is most advantageous to you," remarked Mrs. Thorne.


"Very. Somewhat of a tumble-down civilization we have, viewed slantwise, but on the whole it is about as it should be, I guess."

Mrs. Stillman again adjusted her spectacles and gave him a searching look.

"But commercial traveling is peculiar," he went on to say, for he was now approaching a subject which lay very near his heart. "Some get there, and some don't, it seems. One needs to have the possibilities of the universe within him to cope with saints and sinners alike."

"Human nature is diversified, surely," remarked Mrs. Stillman, smiling with a quiet tolerance.

"Why, it is as prolix as the chantings of a spring poet," expostulated Quaint. "At the hotels tips are expected, trade sometimes comes slow, and you must be armed with a catching discount to sell goods at all, the plan of credit has become so elastic and uncertain. Then there is the lackadaisical storekeeper who is successful only in making assignments and letting his creditors whistle to keep up their courage. I go shy of these as much as I can, and take the truly honest merchant by his right hand and give him the inside every time. Spot cash takes the average wholesaler like fun, and he who honors a draft promptly



is a luminary in the mercantile sky, you better believe."

"Have another biscuit, Mr. Crippen," volunteered the senior widow, still very graciously.

"Thanks. My distinct failing, as you have no doubt discovered;" and Quaint laughed as he cast a devoted look into Mrs. Thorne's calm and studious face. She seemed to be following him with a deepening interest. For the time Quaint had cast propriety to the winds, and was very largely himself again. He was indeed master of his profession, and could doubtless have spun out the talk for hours, could it only have continued on in his line.

"A straight tip to the windward in case a man's unfortunate and likely to go to the wall is better than a new customer," he explained further. "We need quality rather than quantity. Sixty days' time, good indorsed paper and other iron-bound security fills the astute jobber's eyes with tears of compassion and righteousness. He sleeps more peacefully and gets a better hold on life when his exchequer is unquestioned. It is a little hard

on the debtor, I know, but it's 'business,' as we drummers call it, for short."

"Yes, I see," admitted Mrs. Stillman, thoughtfully stirring her coffee. It was evident, however, that she had not only not seen, but had understood no more than half of the phrases of the road which Quaint had so dextrously woven into his talk.

When the two daughters had set themselves at work clearing away the table, Mrs. Stillman took the babe and went out beneath a spreading elm. She invited her guest to accompany her, and a very enjoyable little chat did Quaint have with her alone. He carried her further into the fabulous regions of trade, over the prairies of the great West, and entertained her with many a peculiar narrative of both hamlet and city, all told in his ready off-hand vernacular. Thus Quaint became victor at last, for whatever had existed between him and his aged friend in the way of a barrier was now thrown down and utterly destroyed. Should not his happiness now have been complete?

Miss Alice was the first to join them, after which Eleanor came out, dressed in a lovely

afternoon gown which set off her petit form to a nicety. Quaint was again in raptures. Somehow she seemed to possess just his idea of feminine grace and womanliness. To let him state his case, he would certainly have said he had never before seen so perfect a creature anywhere, though, forsooth, he may have met hundreds of them, but, as his eye and heart had not been attuned to the one harmonious vibratory key, he, like other men, had passed them by.

The afternoon sped rapidly on. Quaint more than once consulted his not altogether forgotten measure of propriety, to determine just how late he ought to stay. This charming romance seemed to him like a good story, and should he not tarry too long, the happy experience might properly "be continued," as many good stories are.

But the last rays of a yellow sunset were disappearing from the horizon before he could school himself to take his leave. Evidently the visit had been uncommonly agreeable to them all. After he had shaken hands with Mrs. Stillman and Alice, Eleanor, with womanly tact, strolled with him down to the

gate; but before they reached there a brief silence had dropped in between them. She was serious by nature; now she looked queenly in her certain mannerly reserve, which had none of the affected indifference which belongs to the untutored maiden. Doubtless she had seen just enough of the world to be able to live a fact, without coquetry or inconsequent talk.

When she reached forth her hand she said, with a peculiar loveliness in her words: "I thank you sincerely, Mr. Crippen, for the interest you have shown in our welfare. I can scarcely think of the one almost ludicrous circumstance which has made us friends without a regret that I could not have been more self-possessed after my misfortune. I hardly deserved to be thus befriended."

"Have you thought of destiny?" ventured Quaint, still lightly pressing the hand he held. "Are you a believer in destiny as understood by the ordinary mortal?"

Mrs. Thorne looked thoughtfully down a moment. "Yes," she mused; "for circumstances often prove to us that our lives have been previously moulded, — that is destiny,

I suppose. We cannot alter that." Then she said less seriously, "Of course we shall see you again in time."

"Since I am to come with your consent, yes. My lot is a rather cheerless one as lots go, and I shall hardly forget this altogether enjoyable visit. Do you think I could?" he asked, feigning a word of sentiment.

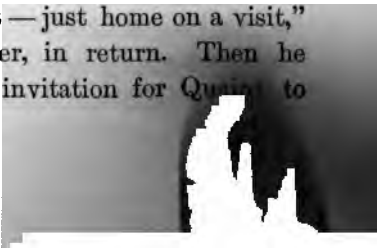
With this he gave the hand he dared hold no longer a friendly shake, then said, merely, "Good-night." After a like response Mrs. Thorne turned and strolled leisurely back towards the house.

CHAPTER X.

A BRISK walk soon brought our hero to the suburbs of the town, and the nearer he approached his hotel the more slowly he went, living as he now was in a sort of wistful, dreamy contemplation. Once he was about to pass a church, whose front doors stood wide open. Still half absently he paused and looked within. He could hear the words of the minister, who was in the midst of his sermon. So cheery and inviting did the church seem that Quaint sauntered into the vestibule, where a polite young man, acting as usher, stood listening to the discourse. Quaint also stood a moment in silence, then he whispered to the usher, —

“Rather youthful minister, is n’t he?”

“College student — just home on a visit,” whispered the usher, in return. Then he made a gesture of invitation for Quaint to take a seat inside.



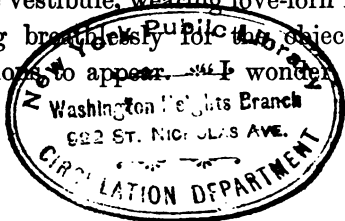
Quaint went in and sat down, but not without causing a flutter of turned heads, this audience being no exception to the others of its kind.

The yet-to-be minister had already spoken with extreme ardor upon the subject of Love. Love for the Deity as it dwells in the human heart is eternal. Love of God means salvation. From the exalted love we come next to the often fickle and deceptive love of one mortal for another. When such love has the divine sanction, all is well. But who shall discriminate between the true and the false? This bids us pause. Dare we supplant the love of God for that of one another? Personal attractions which exist in the world at large are often misleading and sinful. The heart of the youth becomes inflamed, the brain tissues go mad with cerebral fever, wrongful and sinful desires to possess some goddess of infatuation drive the unregenerate sinner to plunge deeper and deeper into the pool of distressing insobriety, act upon act follows, intemperance, worldliness, misery, and despair come next, until God at last shuts out His light entirely, and the unfortunate soul is

lost, lost, — yea, terrible as it may seem, and thus the love in the human breast becomes as a venom in disguise! Root it out, dear, beleaguered youth, before it is too late to save thy soul, and plant in its stead the love of God, unhampered by the alluring potentialities of chance acquaintances!

Quaint drew a long breath, smiled, and looked about him. He tried to note the effect of all this upon the bevies of young people present. But there was no perceptible effect upon any one but himself. It must be, he concluded, that every good Christian youth thinks, if he thinks at all, that the minister does not mean him, but the other fellow, of course. With so alluring a topic the college student mounted higher and higher in his rhetorical flights, and his peroration must have been truly harrowing to the average lover of the day.

"I wonder what he knows about it," thought Quaint to himself, as he strolled out of the church, past the dozens of youths who crowded the vestibule, wearing love-lorn looks and waiting breathlessly for the objects of their affections to appear. — I wonder if he



gets all that in college, — maybe,” he mused, not a little relieved to find himself once more out under the dome of the stars, which even now seemed to look down upon him as friendly as ever.

Arrived at his hotel, Quaint strolled in past the squads of dubious loungers, men, mostly, who were doubtless passing the Sabbath with commendable fortitude, — men of differing aims and nativity, — stranded here in the grimy atmosphere of tobacco-smoke and desultory talk, all waiting as if chained to some clod or hindrance, and paying the forfeit for being traveling men; past these Quaint went, but finding no congenial corner in which to while away the time, he soon sought his room and turned on the light. Before the glass he stood, and smiled.

“Quaint, my jolly good tramp,” spoke he, with a forbearing grin, “can *you* profit by that minister’s say-so? Terrible, is n’t it? Ten to one he has never been in love himself for one blessed minute; what do you say, my old pard?” but the man in the glass only smiled silently back, and for a full minute Quaint stared at the knowing face, but so far

as he could discover, not a trace of sadness could he see upon it.

Protruding from his coat-pocket Quaint discovered the corner of a letter, and with a happy negligence he pulled it forth and opened it.

"Oh, to be sure," he smiled facetiously.

The note, which was enclosed in a pretty cream envelope, was daintily perfumed, and written in a regular hand. It said: "Please accept the enclosed bank-note in due return for your expenses in my daughter's behalf. I beg of you to excuse my seeming anxiety to return the entire amount, though I assure you it would have better fulfilled my wishes had I returned even more than this. Again thanking you, please believe me your sincere friend and well-wisher," etc., etc. It was signed, "Rachel Stillman," and was a note the matron had slipped into Quaint's hand just as he was taking his leave.

"Bless her saintly shadow!" ejaculated Quaint, in rapturous contemplation. "I do believe I shall yet fall madly in love with this prim and aged mistress of the manse — either her — or the babe, maybe," he added in mock concern.

Then it occurred to him that the amount enclosed was precisely fourteen cents more than his claim; and now would n't he some day return said surplusage to this estimable financier? Well, Quaint ere long undressed and went to bed, and dreamed some remarkable things. He dreamed that he met a poor cripple in a crowded city, who was starving. With his sympathies quickly aroused, he drew Mrs. Stillman's identical bank-note from his pocket and bought the cripple his dinner, and the balance he dropped into his shrunken palm, after which he stood a moment and watched him hobble away with a "God bless you" on his lips. Then Quaint awoke and let his eyes follow the shadows from the electric lights as they chased each other about his room.

"That money shall go to the first deserving charity I run afoul of," he resolved in as many words, then he turned drowsily over and went to sleep again.

CHAPTER XI.

It was the next day, nearly noon, that Quaint was on his way toward Albany. He had left New York on an early train, in the best of spirits, only things were so changed. It seemed an age since he made his last sales in Hartford. A few qualms of conscience had overtaken him for having lost a whole working-day, but, honestly, who was to blame? Perhaps he needed the rest; and if the house found fault, why, he would try to make up for it in some way.

Quaint had as usual drawn two or three of his fellow-passengers into a friendly debate on current topics; and by his spontaneous laughter it could be readily judged that the talk was not without its occasional flashes of humor. They were just passing one of those picturesque stretches of country which are so famous along the banks of the Hudson. One of Quaint's listeners had called his attention

to the scenes, which, in lovely contrast with the clear blue of the sky above, were certainly well worth commenting upon.

"I have an interest in that land," Quaint remarked very casually.

"Eh?" queried a farmer-like individual at his left. "Got a sound title, I presume? I've just been investing in some tolerable good prairie land out West, but had some little trouble getting a straight deed. Prairie land is the stuff for utility, though. What do they raise down here, mostly?"

But before Quaint could reply, another talkative stranger, who may have been college-bred, and who had heard his remark, also put in a word of his own.

"Does real estate come high around here?" he asked. Quaint nodded, but let the cars spin joyously on without any special comment. Presently they came in sight of an immense villa surrounded by a magnificent orchard and numerous gardens of flowers.

"I have a part ownership in that too," offered Quaint, in a little off-hand way.

The Westerner now turned a gaze of intense incredulity upon his informer. "And

yet you travel?" Quaint nodded. "Like to travel, I suppose."

"Guess I like it, some," wisely agreed Quaint.

Another passenger, doubtless a land-owner from somewhere, had by this time turned around to look at Quaint.

"I hadn't heard that Featherstone had sold an interest in his place," he volunteered to remark. "Pretty good property; don't you find it so?"

"Very," still wisely agreed Quaint.

A passenger across the aisle was bending over to catch some of the talk. He, too, ventured to say, —

"After all, real estate is about the best gilt-edge investment; take it in easy times, I mean."

"Tolerable," nodded Quaint, keeping up a remarkable composure. Soon, however, he said with sudden emphasis: "Do you see that perfect piece of farm property yonder, — that white barn and straggling brick residence, those magnificent hedges and live-stock?"

Now worked up to a pitch of excessive

admiration, the three others looked with all their eyes until the place was well out of sight.

"I have a very large interest in that place, too," spoke Quaint, as if it were the commonest thing imaginable.

An old lady in Quaker garb now turned around and cast a solemn look upon him. Some peculiar glances were exchanged between the other passengers; but Quaint whistled softly to himself, as if the state of his conscience was the least of his troubles. One of his listeners, doubtless more suspicious than the rest, asked Quaint rather facetiously if he would kindly inform him just how much of God's territory he did own, and have done with it; how much, he meant, in his own name, free from encumbrance. But just then a sudden idea seemed to have struck a certain other sedate individual who had thus far kept his silence.

"How would you like to invest a few thousand in Michigan farms?" he asked in perfect good faith.


"Me?" echoed Quaint. "You must take me for a man of means. It is a fact, sir, but I

could n't buy a quarter-acre lot. How came you to suppose I had money to invest?"

"I judged mostly by your numerous investments along the Hudson," still truthfully replied the stranger. "You are certainly well fixed for real estate."

"You may be property-poor, — I presume you are," suggested the Michigan man, consolingly. "But you will be all right when the times improve. Just keep the deeds in your own name, and —"

"As far as that goes," chimed in Quaint, also very consolingly, "I let the other man hold the deeds. The way I acquire such ample interests in landed estates is something like this: Mr. Goldman, for example, owns a million-dollar place. He spends his thousands to beautify it, to bring it to a state of cultivation which pleases everybody. His flowers spring up, blossom, and fade. Year after year he goes through with the same performance. Did it ever occur to you that he has a motive in expending such vast amounts so lavishly? Why, gentlemen, he does it for no other earthly reason than to secure other people's interest in it; to arouse their admi-



ration, their indorsement of his good taste, and all that. I caught on to this fact some years since, until, do you know, I now count myself a many times millionaire in very fact. I like an enterprise with thrift in it, so, of course, I have a greater or less interest in every well-kept farm in America; and, mind you, I am as free to help myself to such undivided shareholdings as the fellow who holds the deeds and pays the taxes."

A smile of stupefaction came upon the farmer's face before he could understand all Quaint was saying. The college-bred gentleman leaned back with a moan of distress, while the man across the aisle made as if he had not heard a word. Quaint now had only one listener left, — a jolly sort of fellow who seemed to like the way he got at the abstruse questions of the day.

"Look here!" said Quaint to him, with energy. "Suppose there were only one man living, and he a millionaire. Do you suppose he would spend years beautifying his place for his own gratification merely? Not if you let me tell it. Every improvement any man makes in his property is an invitation to the

every-day mortal to take an interest in it. Is n't that a fact?"

The passenger nodded.

"Great cure that for envious people," Quaint went on to say. "With my views I could n't be envious—now, could I? I saunter past my neighbor's grounds, I see his velvety lawn, I get a scent of his roses, the build of his house suits me, and do you know that that man and I are actual co-possessors of all those beautiful things; and he knows it. If he happens to be at his window when I pass, he gets a little twinge of pleasure right here under his vest, because he knows I am enjoying myself. No, no; I can't envy that man in the least."

"Then you don't care to hold the deeds?"

"Not on general principles. To be sure, a certain cozy little homestead one might consent to pay the taxes on and not fret over it. But these so-called surplus landed estates, fences to repair, leaky roofs to fix, tenants to be ousted by force of law, whether they have a place to go to or not,—I say, men grow gray over these trifles too soon. Yes, and they grow wrinkled, get feeble, and die as

poor as church mice, simply because the Almighty won't let them take their belongings along with them."

So extremely novel were Quaint's words that two of the other passengers condescended to listen again, though they endeavored to treat the matter with the utmost caution. A slick talker like Quaint might lead them into any number of puzzling intricacies, and perhaps get the laugh on them in the bargain.


"But men of vast reputations are considered great in their way," suggested the passenger.

"Another very, very common mistake," protested Quaint. "Nor is the warrior who takes a city great in the strictest sense. Personal greatness is a myth. The world rants over people who are famous. I don't. Just tell me if you can what men are great. Here, if you please, is a man who cleans the streets," and Quaint held up one forefinger. "Here is a man who rules a country," and he held up another finger. "Man number one fills his mission to a letter. The statesman fills his mission to a letter. Is one greater than the other? Not at all. It takes

my first man's best energies to clean the streets well. It takes my other man's best energies to rule a nation well. There you have it precisely. Those men are equals. Do you catch it?"

Quaint's hearer was staring at him with all his eyes. Quaint might have mistaken his stare for a lack of understanding, for he said further without the least hesitancy, —

"Talk about the vanities of mankind, and you have a queer lot to deal with. I for one don't understand where personal greatness comes in. For example: Imagine yourself up in a balloon, — perfect calm about you, and you looking down with all your eyes. Activity on land seems to have come to a standstill. The most turbulent fever of excitement, such as drives men mad, is not in the least noticeable from your lofty point of view. Why? Because civilization at best cuts a figure most insignificant. From your altitude it is scarcely skin deep; and yet men puff themselves up as great in more ways than one, and they love to dominate the lesser inhabitants of the ant-hills. They point with pride to their towering church spires, their great piles of masonry; but f



really lofty view—your view from the balloon, for instance—it is all flat and insipid. So I say, whenever we truly get above earthly things, and can look wisely down upon mankind out of the perfect calm, we carry the power of an empire with us. We can witness a political squabble, and smile; a neighborhood wrangle, and love our neighbors still.”

A sort of mixed laugh followed this unique speech, and the few passengers now in hearing seemed willing that Quaint should continue to entertain them; but just as he ceased speaking the train was already pulling into the Albany Depot. What a mastery has scheduled time over the destiny of him who travels! Conversations, however friendly and profitable, are suddenly cut short, newly-made friends who meet for a brief moment only, part perhaps never to meet again, and yet the most humble human tongue can sometimes drop a word which may even help to shape the destiny of a nation.

This was Quaint's stopping-place. With a smiling farewell he left the little group and ambled out of the coach and into the subway of the depot. While passing the fruit-stalls

in the Arcade he heard a familiar voice call his name.

"Ah, there, Quaint! Did you just blow in?"

A fellow-drummer came out of a barber-shop and stepped alongside of him. He, too, had his luggage in his hand.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Larry? When did you leave Boston?"

"Early this morning, Quaint. That reminds me, now, — rather funny circumstance, was n't it? Got your name in print for once, eh?" and the drummer began a happy chuckle. "That sister of yours! — pretty yarn, too, for a starter. The Boston papers copied it."

"I dare say they did," agreed Quaint, also laughing good-naturedly. "Fiction mostly, though."

But as the two men were going to different hotels, no further explanations were permitted, and once more Quaint was left wholly to himself and his sample cases. It might take him some little time to get his business bearings, but get them in time he would, of course.

CHAPTER XII.

BUT that little skit about Quaint's "sister," though getting somewhat stale, as Quaint thought, proved advantageous to him in a single instance, at least. One of Albany's broad-shouldered merchants greeted him with the fable upon his lips and a merry twinkle in his eye. But Quaint's ready tact and smiling fortitude was quick to win the merchant's sympathies. After the laugh had subsided, Quaint managed to get in a sort of badly framed explanation, which neither the merchant nor his partner pretended to believe, of course; but back of it all must have been concealed a belief that Quaint had acted the part of a hero, at all events, for it was true that his order for cottons was swelled several cases larger, though Quaint might never know just why the house had been thus liberally inclined.

We are already aware that Quaint never troubled himself much about business matters,

anyway. The trade door seemed to stand open to him, and he entered therein without any special flurry or intrusion; and his magnetic good-will being uppermost, sales came about after a fashion, and as favorably, perhaps, as if obtained by studied eloquence. There is a secret in the keeping of the truly illumined soul which the modern made-up salesman knows not of. And yet it is a secret to be acquired, not learned.

That evening on his way to Syracuse Quaint talked to no one, for, just before getting on the train, he espied upon the news stand a book with a novel title. It was called "The Vision of Self." For a half-dollar he became the owner of it, and before the train pulled out he had settled himself comfortably in his seat for a quiet season of reading.

The book was about a man who loved greatness. He loved it with intense ardor and earnestness of soul. Fame was his one all-desired goal, to reach which he would leave no resource unsought. He lived, he suffered, and died. But before he went out of his earthly tenement, an aged man, said to




be a latter-day mystic, called to offer him consolation. The sufferer seemed to have caught a glimpse of the life beyond. A sudden satisfied look came upon his face. Questioned as to this, he told the mystic that he felt sure another existence awaited him ; that he might yet attain his end, and even win the plaudits of angels in the spheres beyond. The mystic heard, then dropped a single word of counsel. "Thou hast but to renounce Self, and the Kingdom of Glory is with thee even now!" he said. "Self?" repeated the sufferer, in amazement. His eyes were glassy with a sudden dismay. But ere long a deep conviction stole upon his features. He smiled and seemed at rest. "God bless you, my aged friend," he said quietly. "I have both lost and won. The terrible vision of Self is past, and though I shall live again, I have conquered!" Then he closed his eyes in sleep.

Quaint was musing upon this curious masterpiece of wisdom as the train approached Schenectady. Past the great electric works, with its hundreds of lighted windows, they sped, and he thought of the truly famous

inventor for whom this monument of industry had been reared. Had Edison worked for the plaudits of either man or angels?

Our hero had an easy way of applying lessons thus casually learned. He seemed to see with an untrained eye what others could not see. He was an untiring observer. Just at this hour in the evening he loved to muse and enjoy the rest which comes from musing. Gradually his inmost thoughts stole back to the cottage on the Sound. She with womanly smile sat beside him, and they talked again. The babe, like a flitting fairy, crept in between them and began a prattle of infant words. The friendly hum of the car was restful and soothing. A hundred old-fashioned spinning-wheels seemed turning, turning ever on beneath a woman's dreamy touch. The old garret was resplendent with a golden aura, and the other aged trophies talked and capered about like skeletons of other days. Still they sat and talked, as the ceaseless clatter and hum went on. Past the smaller towns the train was speeding, while Quaint nodded and mused and dreamed. But it was a vision all too comforting to last. In



the very midst of it Quaint felt a rough hand upon his shoulder. Thus suddenly aroused from his brief slumber, he stared vacantly about him.

“Syracuse!” called out the trainman; and Quaint, with a grin of secret delight, looked out upon the long street of residences, down the middle of which the train was moving with laggard pace. Through the very heart of the business center they went, the glimmering electric lights sending queer phantom shadows into the dusky coaches.

Quaint registered at the Yates that night, and after supper he sat down to write up his orders. This done, he wondered how he could spend the evening. The old habit of now and then an opera, story-telling, and laughter at the hotel, or strolling with some fellow-drummer up and down the business streets, — any of these seemed too much like his old self, — the self which existed before the light of another creature’s eyes had intruded itself into his vision. He thought of writing to his friends in Greensward. No; propriety wouldn’t permit. And yet couldn’t he frame some gauzy excuse for

sending a mere word of some kind, just to let them know how he fared?

It took Quaint some time to persuade himself that he might write at least a kind of non-committal letter, just to soothe his longings, if, indeed, that was what his present feelings might be called.

Well, how might he address her? Here Quaint's knowledge of letter-writing seemed to fail him. He would begin a sheet and see how it looked. So he wrote: —

MY MUCH ESTEEMED FRIEND, — Please be not surprised at hearing from me so soon, though you must agree with me that life is full of surprises of one kind and another. My day's work is done, my orders have been written up, and if you will please pardon my perhaps unregenerate and wayward self, I will own up to you that I cannot help thinking of you and your pleasant home in Greensward. I may not have made it plain to you that I considered myself right royally treated by both you and your most praiseworthy parent. Could I feel quite sure that I had made this fact plain to you, I do not suppose I would be writing this letter to-night. But men of my stamp are thoughtless by nature, and often leave a good deal unsaid. And, too, the time passed so agreeably and so rapidly

at your home, I must certainly have forgotten very much indeed. In this letter, however, I have resolved to tell you frankly how much the visit was to me—and yet words tell nothing when you get down to the reality of things. But in Baby Ruth's innocent eyes I believe I saw a mere hint of that heaven you told me about on the train. Do you remember how perfectly you convinced me that there is a heaven—on earth, you said? Well, well, that seemed novel enough; and yet, is it not so? I find the merest of us have need of heaven,—men in particular. Of women you must know I am not so well informed.

I have wondered if you would care to write me a word or two about how you are getting along. You can reach me at Chicago, care general delivery, for I expect to reach there Saturday night. Please do so, for I am doubly sure a letter will be most welcome to me. If you have left anything unsaid, please say it in your letter. I shall not be surprised at what you may say, for I am trained to surprises.

Now, Mrs. Thorne, lest I may overstep the boundary line of propriety (to which you know I am a clinging convert), I will close by wishing you a happy good-night. Kindly give my regards to your mother, and please say to her that her remittance to me overran my claim some fourteen cents, which I shall be most happy to return

to her in person at some time not far distant. Again wishing you all a happy good-night, I remain, your admiring friend and well-wisher,

Q. CRIPPEN.

TO MRS. ELEANOR THORNE,
Greensward, Conn.

P. S. I have just been reading a book, which I will send you by next mail. Please tell me what you think of it.

It was a fact that Quaint had kept out volumes of what he might have said. But as he read the epistle over, he decided that he had done an even measure of justice to himself, or had committed no folly, at any rate.

Looking up just then, he saw a gray-coated letter-carrier skurrying into the hotel lobby gathering up the mail. In a twinkling Quaint had his letters ready to seal, so that the carrier might get them off on the night train. Rising hurriedly, he handed them over with a sigh of relief. All this dispatch might have been well enough, if in his haste Quaint had n't incautiously sent his warm-hearted missive to the house, and his orders for cottons to the Widow Thorne.

CHAPTER XIII.

MUCH might be chronicled of Quaint's trip to Chicago, could it be crowded into the limits of our allotted space; but it can be readily surmised that our hero did not often lack for something to occupy his ever-ready mind, so filled with original and queerly conceived notions generally.

Trade had been fairly good. Quaint dreamed more than ever before. Aside from this, the many Western merchants who knew him so well might have said that he had not changed much since the time they last met him. It was when alone by himself that Quaint felt the meaning of life grow deeper and wider. He was becoming more wistfully tolerant of the thousands who were living in error. He saw in the daily toiler a being more worthy of his admiration. He was acquiring a broader charity for the religious devotee who hugs the literal interpretations

of his sacred book, and who offers up devout prayers for his own special creed or patron saint. He saw new beauties in life's purposes and their evident completeness. A warm, throbbing pulsation filled his inner self when he thought of true womanhood as the guiding star of man and men. Had all these tendencies to better things been quickened by one mere incident which might have happened to a thousand traveling men?

Quaint always liked Chicago, and was wont to heave a comfortable sigh of relief when the town was reached. This time, however, he was looking forward to Saturday night with a more than common anxiety. As soon as he reached his hotel he hurried over to the post-office and gave his name in at the general delivery window. The clerk, with a deliberateness worthy of Job, ran slowly over the mail — yes — two letters; that was all. Tossing them out, he turned about with a freakish indifference which brought a sinister smile to Quaint's over-anxious visage.

From the smaller envelope he took the neatly folded sheet of note-paper. His heart throbbed and made him feel like a coward.

But the first sentence that met his eye nearly took his breath.

“Great heavens!” he muttered, in a smothered undertone. “Can that be possible?” This is what the letter said:—

GREENSWARD, July 2, 18—.

MY DEAR MR. CRIPPEN,—I received your several orders for cottons two days since, and for a time I hardly knew what to do with them. But mother’s counsel as usual carried me over the dilemma, and by the next mail I had them dispatched to your house in Boston, and now I take this method of humbly asking your early pardon if I erred in so doing. This morning your letter came to me via Boston, but you may believe me when I tell you it was none the less welcome for its tardiness. How could you have made this funniest of mistakes? Yet when we come to think of it, mistakes are not our worst crimes, after all.

I hardly know how to express my gratitude to you for kindly remembering us in your travels. Your letter was every bit what a letter should be, and we all feel like asking you to write again when you can find a few minutes’ spare time on your hands. Mother and I visit, and visit, and may never get through visiting. As for the heaven you allude to, what of the prodigal daughter who returns to a home like ours?

It has been worth living a lifetime to bring about this one fond event of my days. I feel sure you will pardon my warmth of speech regarding my old home, for only one home now exists for me in all the wide, wide world. Mother and I laugh heartily over your exactnesses in financial matters. It was certainly a pity for us to have had to allude to money at all; but mother would have it so, and of course I never oppose her in any of her worldly reckonings.

Please permit me to prophesy that your next visit with us will be a most welcome one. It seems as if we two, most casual acquaintances, to be sure, lived many days during those few short hours of tribulation. It was indeed a cloud with a silver lining, for which I must still insist upon thanking you. To look philosophically upon it, our two birth-signs may have been planned upon the lines of this one singular happening. If so, I trust we shall remain lifelong friends, that the planetary arrangement, if such it is, may be fittingly recognized.

I will not make this letter longer, but will hasten it off by an early mail, so it will reach you by Sunday. Mother and Alice send kindest regards, and Baby Ruth, who grows lovelier every day, bundles her regards in with ours, of course. With many earnest wishes for your welfare and happiness, believe me, your devoted friend,

ELEANOR E. THORNE.

P. S. Oh, to be sure — that book. But mother has n't given me a minute by myself, so of course I have not read it yet. Many thanks to you for sending it.

Had Quaint been two separate beings just then, he could have both wept and laughed aloud. Certain it was that no one in his frame of mind could take a letter like that in at a glance. Letters often contain more than the bare meaning of their words. The most uninformed in occult law will unconsciously transmit to another his or her very thoughts and feelings, while the spiritually developed mind will receive impressions from them which are not so much as hinted at in the letter.

But a tremor of apprehension swept over Quaint as he thought of the other letter he held in his hand. Would the house pounce upon him with a cudgel of reproof? He would look and see. As his eyes fell upon the letter written in the senior member's own hand, he flushed, then smiled as if momentarily consoled. Quietly, and in a few brief words "Chippy" wrote that fortunately his letter to the widow had fallen only under his

own tolerant eyes, and that he had promptly forwarded the same to its destination. He trusted Quaint would try to be more discreet in the future, then closed by congratulating his prince of salesmen upon the liberal number of orders he was sending in.

"All very nice," quibbled Quaint. Even though "Chippy" had been thus exquisitely choice in his words, he believed he saw a broad grin permeating every line he had written. Yet the dear old soul had good reason to laugh, now, had n't he?

When Quaint walked down the post-office steps he could not resist the temptation to glance again through the widow's note. Now a little used to his emotional transports, he saw new symmetry of expression in the well-chosen phrases, and still deeper tenderness of thought woven in and about them. Words seemed inadequate to express his now exultant feelings.

"Heaven? And what of Foxy?" he surmised. "Foxy may have found his reward in the Celestial City, and that may be heaven to him; but I do say, solemnly and unequivocally, that for downright heavenly encourage-

ment, give me the pretty daring of a woman's comforting glance."

This spurt of homely philosophy ran through Quaint's mind somewhat at random. He almost spoke the words aloud as he folded the widow's perfumed note and put it away in his pocket. It was a rather extravagant expression, to be sure, and one which he would never have confided to any one; but in all its queer-ness it was one of his customary secret vows of loyalty which he was wont to make and store up in his yearning soul, to help him to fight better the battles of life. That was all.

After supper Quaint glanced over the hotel register, — a sort of idle habit traveling men have, — and was thrilled with a vague pleasure at finding, written in a bold, consequential hand, the signature of a well-known Boston citizen. It was that of the Honorable Sebastian Hume, moralist and traveler, who Quaint understood had the cause of humanity at heart if any living creature had. A curiosity at once possessed him to meet the gentleman. A brief word with the hotel clerk, and he learned that the Bostonian was

yet in at supper. Requesting the clerk to favor him with an introduction, Quaint picked up a newspaper to read. But almost immediately thereafter Mr. Hume appeared, and was courteously introduced to Quaint. The two shook hands cordially, though Quaint felt a trifle embarrassed when he beheld the towering personality of Mr. Hume. The latter, however, did not seem to observe that Quaint was any less his equal for being an ordinary citizen. This much for the Boston habit of good-breeding.

"You will please pardon me, Mr. Hume," began Quaint, as they drew up their chairs for a quiet chat; "but, being a Boston man myself, I love to have a word now and then with a fellow-townsmen when I run afoul of him. I have known you for some little time by reputation."

"Do you reside in Boston?" asked Mr. Hume. Quaint handed him his card. "I know Mr. Currywell quite intimately," he said, with a comforting smile. "Currywell has fine blood in his veins."

"He is a prince of goodness," put in Quaint, with satisfaction. He did n't know so much

about his employer's blood as he did about his unfailing integrity as a man. "But to be brief with you, Mr. Hume, — for I am sure your time must be fully occupied, — I would like to ask you a question. I understand that some distinct mission brings you West."

"I represent the New England Society of Social and Vital Statistics, so far as my mission is concerned. Aside from that, I am somewhat of a traveler from choice."

"I see; a pleasant vocation all around. And you have just arrived in Chicago?"

"I have been in this vicinity nearly a month now. I make occasional runs out to the adjacent cities. Chicago is a wonderful town; don't you think it?"

"Far beyond the pale of statistical measurement, I fear," laughed Quaint, speculatively. "Going to tabulate the exact status of the civilized West — and then?"

"The West and the East together. Our work is very practical, for we have the entire realm of Fact to work in. There are logical deductions to be made of all that exists, both laterally and vertically, so to speak. Our

society, which is backed up by some of the most brilliant minds in the East, has set out to fathom the existing, actual condition of our much-governed and religiously dominated commonwealth. In this we have two purposes. First, to probe to the root of our national life, nurtured as it is under the bans of freedom. Second, to gather from the annals of crime and intemperance the probability of our existing for a longer or shorter period of time as a republic. Books are to be printed, giving the immense data, gathered as they will be by excessive mental toil. These shall be for the use of both statesman and scholar. Able minds are to give in pronunciamientos the real limit of danger to which we have attained, in figures, sketches, and undoubted tabulated statements, why, how, and to what end our nation exists."

Quaint followed his informant with a look of partial wonderment. Mr. Hume had told all this off in splendidly rounded phrases, which surely admitted of no compromise.

"And when you have done?" he asked.

"When the work is complete, we shall have solved the Social Problem."

“Will have solved it? Let’s see, you will have solved it, of course, in your way. How will it be received?”

“As undoubted authority. As a body politic, our nation is becoming so vast that only a statistician can measure its advancement. The moralist is astounded at the works of Satan, but he can only approximate his power. The great social evil of the coming century must be compared and measured by the intellect of man. Thus the scholar of the near future is to become in part a redeemer of our lost statesmanship and of our frittered-away opportunities to become the most powerful nation on the face of the globe!”

Quaint was growing fond of the rather disproportionate picture Mr. Hume was setting before him; but his own practical ideas of life as he saw it on the road seemed to clash with its evident impracticability. He was tempted to interpose an opinion of his own, meager though it might be.

“You will please pardon me, Mr. Hume,” he said quite humbly, “but would you mind if I offer a suggestion?”

“Certainly not.”

"Well, I believe there is a quicker and better way than yours."


"Quicker way to solve —"

"Oh, no, I would n't solve the problem at all. I would just let the world wag joyously on, without chart or compass, until the heart, not the head of man gets sick."

"And then?"

"Why, I would give up statistics, give up sermonizing, give up praying, if you please, and set the poor much-preached-to devil an example of tolerance. Just now there is a mighty work going on beneath the crust, and man is getting seas of benefit from it, which you and I know little of. The love side of human-kind is about to have its day, and the mental sciences are to take a rest. I have visited nearly every town of any size in the Republic, and I must say that, so far as my observations go, the crying need of man is warmth of soul, appreciation, that good feeling which comes from the universal brotherhood belief, of all of which no mathematical measurements can be taken."

Mr. Hume was smiling with a very happy tolerance, as Quaint warmed to his subject.



"My way is never to preach or proselyte," he continued, while his chances were good. "I don't bank on my morality, I simply *am*. I don't even whimper if I get betrayed or get robbed, but I do try to forget that such a man as Q. Crippen exists. Personalities are poor investments in the long run. A man can't be real good and personally great at one and the same time. To be famous is pretty cold consolation, for too much talent on deck chills the spine. You get my idea, of course?"

Mr. Hume's look of mature wisdom rather overtopped Quaint's rambling philosophies. As the former had not picked up his education on the road, he must certainly feel quite secure in all he claimed, at least.

"I think I understand," he said very condescendingly. From his side coat-pocket he drew forth a case. "Have a cigar, please?"

"No, thanks; I never smoke." Then Quaint waited until his friend had lighted his cigar. "Chicago is a paradise for the moralist, be he either a scientist or a mere citizen," he said.


"I judge so. How different from Boston!" and Mr. Hume toyed musingly with his cigar.

"Different? why, yes, a thousand times

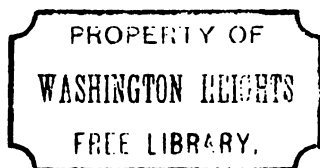
different ; but give me old Boston as a place in which to breathe the pure atmosphere of good sense and sobriety. The fluffy fashions among the women find little following there. The men are kind and affable, and though deucedly respectable at times, they average well as a whole. Chicago is a sort of wholesale dumping-ground for that civilization which goes in on a large scale, mortgages its realty, and smiles on its almost certain reverses. Pluck, some call it. It takes good nerves to be a man in this town. In Boston one can behave himself at least without censure."

Thus the conversation ran on for some little time and until a third personage appeared, who, apparently a friend of Mr. Hume's, was introduced to Quaint.

"This is Mr. Cranston, my colleague," explained Mr. Hume, arising from his chair. Mr. Cranston gave Quaint's hand a neighborly shake ; but as the two men were by previous appointment to go out together, they very properly excused themselves and withdrew. Quaint watched them as they retreated from his sight.



“Jolly good saints, I dare say,” he soliloquized. “A New England collection of social and vital statistics will not be a work to be scoffed at, at least. I believe I will own a copy of the book when it is out.”



CHAPTER XIV.

LATE that night Quaint strolled down one of the brilliantly lighted streets, which he did more from habitual unrest than from any particular desire for observation. He had heard of the uncanny spirit of evil which stalks abroad o' nights in Chicago, and though he did not expect to run against his spookship personally, he did believe it barely possible to discover how evil could prevail in the midst of a civilization which was so busy as was that of the Garden City.

He had halted for a moment in front of one of the great newspaper offices, in the basement beneath which the eager presses stood momentarily waiting, while from the lower floor up the building seemed alive with bustling activity and the glare of electric lights. The counting-room stood open, and with little thought of intruding Quaint strolled deliberately in. Like all gifted souls, he was not long in catching

the spirit of push going on everywhere. He wondered if a stranger would be permitted in the regions above. With this query upon his lips he approached a clerk who sat behind the tall wire grating.

"Take elevator," was all he heard the man say, for he had not so much as raised his eyes from his work.

Two good-looking, chivalrous young men came in just then, chatting and laughing with the freedom of boys. It was Quaint's privilege to slip into the elevator with them, and in the next second they were speeding swiftly upward. How many stories they passed Quaint will never know, but at the upmost story the elevator stopped suddenly, and the door thereof slid open with a clanging sound.

"What's the best word, my friend?" queried one of the fellows, turning a quick glance upon Quaint, who, we shall be pleased to know, kept his wits about him.

"Reporter's room," he said briefly.

"This way," and the youth, striding familiarly forward, turned nimbly into an open doorway.

Already the sound of the telegraph instruments, ticking out relays of the world's news, greeted Quaint's alert ears. Interspersed with this was the frequent thud of the pneumatic copy-carrier, the smothered chant of some bibulous reporter, or the growl of some pessimistic attaché, together with a hundred other confusing sounds and scenes, which seemed everywhere to pervade the humid atmosphere, like a continuous buzz of some ever-moving industry of modern times. Quaint's apt imagination drank these in quite readily, so that in fact he was but little surprised. The reporter who had spoken to him, doubtless a clever lad, gave the other reporters a sly leer, and the leer went around the motley throng of workers like magic. A short, doughty staff member tapped Quaint upon his shoulder.

"Beastly hot to-night. From out of town?"

"Boston," replied Quaint, rather solemnly.

An evil look shot into the reporter's eye, which put Quaint on his guard.

"I say, Bangs, — man from Boston," he called out to a lean, long specimen of humanity who occupied the first table at the right.

Bangs glared out from beneath the cowl he wore, but only with a mere grunt of impatience. "Sit down," he said gruffly, then resumed his work.

A dozen pairs of eyes were at once fixed upon Quaint, and the very air seemed alive with smiles and jests of one kind and another. But, instead of feeling any discomfort, Quaint rather enjoyed the temperature. He kept his eyes fixed upon Bangs, who must have felt his gaze, for soon he looked leeringly up at him.

"I say, young man, how long have you been out?" he queried a little sarcastically.

A titter of laughter went the rounds, but Quaint looked proportionately pleased with the others.

"My dear sir, you remind me of an acquaintance I once had in Texas," spoke Quaint, quite seriously. Another laugh, this time at Bangs, who scowled and grew red in the face. "My Texas friend had brains, but his father was an idiot."

This time a more general laughter was heard, and several other spectators gathered near to learn the cause of the commotion.

“When I use the word ‘idiot,’ I use it advisedly, of course,” explained Quaint. “The father of my distinguished friend was a miser from away back, and lived alone in one of Illinois’ remotest hamlets. He was one of those fiendish, sordid misers, who had a little gold left, but the yellow stuff was the means at times of almost scaring the old man’s life out of him. It’s a fact, gentlemen. He dwelt in a hovel, — did this parent of my distinguished Texas friend, — nearly starved himself to death, and he always put out his candle at midnight to save it.”

By this time Quaint was in good voice, and evidently had some considerable support from those around him. At a certain juncture in his narrative he struck a peculiar dramatic pose, and changed his voice to a ghostly drawl.

“One night Mr. Miser heard a noise. Scratch, scratch, it went, in one of the partitions, and the old man’s beggarly face turned pale with fright. It was a wild, weird night outside, and the wind howled-d and howled-d, and the shutters rattled-d and shivered-d, till the ominous silence between the noises grew

deep and dreadful-l, and was full of spectral shapes untold-d, all which did make the miser's very hair stand on end! Grappling his two bags of gold, he sat him up in bed and shivered-d, and great beads of moisture stood upon his brow; and still the weird wind howled-d and howled-d, and the shutters rattled their ghostly and unearthly rattle, and the scratch, scratch, in the partition sounded louder-r and nearer-r —" and here Quaint's voice had reached a truly grewsome monotone, which had brought still other reporters into the circle to listen. Bangs, now livid with rage, of course, vainly tried to oust the story-teller with his look of contempt.

"And the miser's heart began to quake and beat quick and loud, his breath came thick and fast; and still the wind moaned on-n and on-n, and the scratch, scratch, came oftener from the partition, and the pitchy darkness grew blacker-r and blacker-r, and the miser grew more scared-d and more scared-d, and the shutters rattled-d, and the old clock ticked louder-r and louder-r —"

At this moment all eyes were fixed upon Quaint with intense, gaping eagerness. In

the very midst of it all he stopped speaking and raised one finger. No one stirred a muscle. For the instant Quaint had the whole gang under his dominion. But at last he broke the stillness with a happy, sumptuous laugh.

"What do you think, gentlemen?" he asked, and in his natural tone of voice. "What do you suppose this humble, almost scared-to-death parent of my distinguished Texas friend did just then? Why, in his very anguish he laid him down and went to sleep, and dreamed dreams of gold untold, and in the morning got up feeling *almost* as smart as his distinguished son. Do you catch it?" This with a happy leer over at Bangs.

An instant of almost measureless silence, then came another burst of laughter, which as quickly subsided, for there was a corresponding hustling of all hands back to their work. Though Quaint's simile had been a little obscure, it had fallen among bright minds, and therefore found a ready appreciation. All laughed save Bangs. A bitter smile of intense weariness had crept upon the impious

editor's face, but he remained as silent as a sphinx.

With a most unruffled air Quaint arose and sauntered leisurely into an adjoining room and stood for a time watching one of the operators at his type-writer. A loud-sounding telegraph instrument was reeling off news, and the trained ear of the operator was receiving it, and through supple fingers was he giving it out simultaneously upon his machine, and all this, too, with marvelous swiftness. What a place in which to let loose the imagination! In touch with the remotest corners of the earth were these midnight toilers, each pledged to outdo all rivals in similar fields; and what wonder is it that the modern newspaper has become a power in the land?

It can be surmised that Quaint was now accorded the privilege of undisturbed observation at least, though as he occasionally cast his eye about him he would now and then find some upturned face regarding him with curious concern.

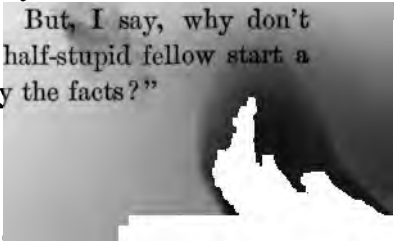
It may have been quite midnight when he at last strolled through the reporters' room

and out into the hallway beyond. Though he may have been regarded by certain lookers-on as a hero having quick wits and a ready tongue, it seemed to make little difference to him. He was so used to taking the world as it came, that any little divergence from the ordinary run of events became with him quickly a thing of the past.

One of the staff of reporters who had heard Quaint's story happened to step into the elevator just as he did. The reporter was inclined to give Quaint a considerable credit for what had occurred between himself and Bangs, but Quaint treated the matter indifferently. Still, he would like to air a thought or two which had occurred to him upon the subject of newspapers. One remark made by the reporter gave him an opening.

"Your observations behind the scenes have been favorable, of course," he implied.

"Favorable so far as convincing me that the public knows very little what it takes to make a newspaper. But, I say, why don't some steady-going, half-stupid fellow start a sheet to print merely the facts?"



"Facts?" and the reporter's eyes filled with pleasant humor. "We get the facts; not only that, but we dress 'em up in presentable shape, or they would never be read."

"Secret of the trade, I dare say," laughed Quaint, now taking his companion's arm quite familiarly. He had volunteered to walk a distance with him down the street. "But you print so much that is mere stuff — please excuse my judgment if I err — but do you know, my dear sir, that the average level-headed citizen has already learned the art of reading newspapers. If he is sober in habit and knows a thing or two, he will take the kernel and leave the chaff for the other fellow. For instance: something happens; you ambitious young bloods get hold of it, inflate it, imagine much, and tip it off with sensational features if possible. News like that goes, no matter whose reputation gets worsted, especially if the paper across the way does n't get it at all."

The reporter smiled wisely; but what cared he with a million-dollar company behind him?

"Then you resort to the strategy of the printer's art," continued Quaint, quite fear-

lessly, "and adorn the yarn with stunning headlines, almost wholly to catch the public eye. The sensational part is intended to tickle the palate of sensation-lovers, while the actual fact is more to be guessed out by the reader who sifts for himself, and waits. The next day four-fifths of the assignment blows away as chaff. Mind you, my friend, I don't say it can be different; but how distinctly modern in its methods has newspaperdom become!"

"Something of a science, for a fact," agreed the reporter, still treating Quaint's remarks with levity. They had stopped before a cozily lighted café, evidently the place the reporter was seeking. "But, sir, let me give you a pointer or two," said the man of news, in parting. "Just keep an eye open for our sixty-four-page Independence edition Monday morning. Glorious? why, it will make your very blood tingle with patriotism. Kindly size up the smile on Uncle Sam's face on the first page, — swallow-tail coat, striped trousers, and the typical crumpled stovepipe hat thrown in. Hist! now, my man, don't give the tip away; and when you run afoul of Bangs —

the Bangs out of the harness, I mean—I dare say you will find him the meekest, most mellow-hearted sinner living. Bangs is a fossil among us boys, but at the club—bah! he can be the giddiest simpleton living. Good-night to you, neighbor. Run up again when you find it convenient;" and with this the reporter broke away, leaving Quaint in a whirl of conflicting emotions.

CHAPTER XV.

SUNDAY morning came, and with it one of those warm summer atmospheres which give to the early sunrise over Lake Michigan a glow of comforting mellowness. Quaint's Sundays were events of themselves. They were never long nor tedious, but were filled with circumstances usually pleasing and instructive. His business cares were wholly put aside, and the day was one of rest, indeed. He took an early car out to Lincoln Park and sat down to view the coming day. Streaks of blue and dull traces of gold, pillars of jasper and slanting be vies of sportive sunbeams danced upon the shimmering waves in silent, ceaseless commotion. The regular swish of the waves upon the well-paved beach seemed only to add to the sacred stillness, — that stillness which precedes a battle or some mighty upheaval of Nature. In another twenty-four hours Young America would be

astir and filling the air with the noise of powder and fuse and shouts of patriotism so dear to the hearts of our loyal countrymen. This morning the very twitter of the birds seemed restful and inspiring.

Among the flowers Quaint went and partook of the fragrant, dewy odors, so free and delicious to all. The animals in their cages, from the buffalo and deer in their scant enclosures to the great eagles and their lesser feathered neighbors, all seemed to be astir and welcoming the coming day. The frisky bear had climbed to the topmost perch in his tree and seemed to be sniffing the luxurious morning light, while the bark of the sea-lion, to some a sound indicative of pent-up distress, broke most weirdly out upon the otherwise perfect calm.

This sort of communion with Nature was Quaint's habit, and had been from boyhood. He lived in constant admiration of the beautiful and the commonplace; and though he may not have known it, he might be styled a worshiper after a crude fashion of his own, perhaps unconscious that it was worship, because no edict of man has ever called it such.

One of the treats Quaint had looked forward to for some time was the privilege of attending a Chicago church. With all his altruistic tendencies, he had not wholly outgrown his love for novelty. He had heard that in the Garden City a portion of the people went to church in opera-houses. How severely odd! He believed he would go there too, since to attend service in a church edifice was a long-followed custom with him. So after a late breakfast he drifted down a neighboring street and along with the crowd, and with as devout a mien as he could command, he mounted the steps up which so many a pleasure-loving youth goes on week-days into the glare of the modern theatricals. He found the lower part of the house and galleries nearly full, and the tide was still pouring in from every opening. Quaint secured a seat in the first gallery and began his study of human nature. From face to face his trained eye went; some showed zeal, some a vital hunger of the soul, suggesting every degree of earnestness and purpose. A handsomely trimmed stage, — tall palms, clusters of roses and wreaths of green entwined with profu-

sions of cut flowers and ferns, — these arrayed in pleasing taste took the place of the lifeless painted scenery which on week-days gilds the delusive stage settings of our times. To Quaint all this was a most pleasing innovation. In his first breath he thanked God that Nature had thus invaded the presence so completely. A chorus of singers were present, two pianos and several stringed instruments; and when their united strains went up toward the great dome they carried with them much that might be styled real praise and thanksgiving. Quaint had forgotten to ask what was the creed of this church, so he was obliged to remain for the present in partial ignorance upon this point.

From among the bowers of green and glowing light at last stepped forth the minister. He was tall and very ordinary in his bearing. He seemed more like a man who had come up out of the audience. But he took his place like one used to a common fellowship with men. His voice at first came low, and his sentences were couched in simple words. He was not handsome, nor was he at all assuming, but a deep hush came over the vast

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audience the moment he began speaking. His subject was, "Destiny and Salvation."

And what a sermon did he preach ! Quaint sat like one entranced. His own very sentiments, his inmost beliefs in mankind, his love of equality, his unsatisfied longings for an humbler Christ, — teaching to redeem an innocently wicked world, all of which he had espoused in fact, but which he had found so hard to carry out, — all these did the truly great man give to his people in humble, unimpassioned words. His logic could be understood by all, hence he could be doubted by none.

At times the speaker became a trifle odd in his expressions, sufficiently so to meet with Quaint's happiest approval. Speaking of the Christian faith, he said he did n't like to indorse a great amount of soul salvation unless the body was included in the deal. The body he believed was worthy of being kept clean, and therefore godly, of being taught obedience to natural law, and was a temple in which a soul, however much it might be saved otherwise, could scarcely live with profit in the midst of filth and distem-

per. Of true riches he spoke Quaint's exact sentiments. Not a longing soul was there present, he said, who was not already rich in that which gives comfort to the inner, secret self. It was the sordid, grasping soul that must taste of hell, indeed; but after having been burned in the crucible of the flesh, that same soul would somewhere in eternity come forth a princely, emancipated spirit, for certainly God knows no other. The one infinite redeemer is Love, of which the human heart is a willing exponent.* Therefore let no paltry unrest, no bewailing of destiny, no doubt of ultimate salvation burden the soul of the humblest denizen of earth, for even a living Father hath mercy.

- Could anything be more supremely just? Quaint was lifted in spirit as never before. He enjoyed the looks of real gratification that he saw upon the faces about him as he slowly made his way out amid the dense throng. The least gifted among those present must have felt deeply the splendid teachings just listened to. Thus Quaint readily guessed the reason why so many had come. When passing through the main entrance he paused

a moment to watch the concourse of people file past him. He enjoyed the study of faces. He saw there a slender, solemn-looking individual, who had also paused and stood beside him. Quaint's irrepressible self sought consolation, so he spoke to the stranger in a neighborly way.

"Splendid discourse that," he said. The stranger assented with a mere word and a nod. "Would you please tell me to what denomination this church belongs?"

"Presbyterian, I believe," was the brief response. The speaker's lips were compressed a little tightly over his words.

Quaint smiled somewhat, but as the man had replied so candidly he must at least take him at his word. But soon Quaint found himself standing next to a large-built, good-natured man, who smiled when the question was put to him.

"Unitarian, mostly, is n't it?" he asked of another man at his side.

"Unitarian or Universalist, I forget which," wisely stated the other.

Now Quaint was in doubt, really; so he reserved his query for some older and more

sincere worshiper to answer. He failed to run across a person of this stamp until he reached the sidewalk. Here he met a dignified, clean-shaven man who wore a snow-white tie. With all the courtesy he could command he put the question to him.

"Methodist, originally. Sort of a stand-off now, I reckon," he said quite pathetically.

Quaint was puzzled more than ever. How vastly different must the sermon have fallen upon the ears of these various-minded citizens! So he said no more about it until he reached his hotel. Of the day clerk he sought the information, and from him received a somewhat more lucid statement.


"It's neither one nor the other — sort of a world's church, whatever that means — crazy-quilt fashion, cut bias, mostly. The preacher — I call him a man, merely — must have a deuced clever make-up to hold his audiences as he does. He has stood trial in two regular churches for speaking his convictions, and he is honest yet, so far as I can learn."

The clerk had spoken in a somewhat rambling, off-hand manner, for just then the porter came trundling toward him, tugging two

heavy valises, with their owner following closely behind. Pounding the gong to announce the new arrival, and to put the bell-boys on their mettle, the clerk smiled his two-thousand-a-year smile and turned the register around for his Sunday patron.

Quaint strolled into the reading-room and sat down to cogitate. How he longed for some one to talk to who felt as he did! Like a flitting shadow of comfort came a thought of his friends in the East. How much would the Widow Thorne have appreciated that sermon! Well, Monday morning's paper would contain a synopsis of it, and this he might send to her in cold print, though he feared much of the soul of the sermon would be lost. He believed he would forestall the newspaper report by a short letter, which he immediately began.

He told her of the receipt of his two most welcome letters the night before; how he enjoyed reading the contents of her own friendly epistle, and though it might be a little early to reply, he thought the subject of the sermon might be sufficient excuse for his lack of propriety, in which he was still an ar-



dent believer. Beside the sermon he alluded again to his pleasant visit in Greensward; how the great West contrasted with the East; how this one discovery of a church so near his liking improved his regards for the great hustling city of Chicago. He believed he would be almost tempted some day to settle right here in the midst of the thousand-and-one heresies and be a man among men; that if she (the widow) ever dreamed of moving West again, and should he resolve to do so too, he verily hoped they might be near neighbors, so that he could drop in and talk over these pet beliefs and teachings without having to send them in letters.

Much else did Quaint write, which we will not take the time to mention. Suffice it to say that in mailing his letter this time he directed it so that it would travel straight to Greensward by the first outgoing mail.

CHAPTER XVI.

It would have done our early compatriots good could they have waked up in the city of Chicago on that one Fourth of July morning. Another holiday for Quaint, which meant another day for observation and study of mankind in its broader aspects. The sixty-four-page newspaper made its appearance as per the reporter's say-so. The profile of that tall and storied fellow so frequently palmed off on the youthful mind as Uncle Sam was printed in three colors, and his fatherly smile was truly inspiring. Almost hidden from sight on the sixty-third page was the sermon of yesterday. It was set in small type, and was flanked by an "ad" of bock beer and some fashionable pills and baking-powder. Yet Quaint read the sermon through, marked it, then rolled the immense sheet up and wrote on the wrapper the name of Mrs. Eleanor Thorne. Rather than intrust it to

the carrier, he took it over to the post-office in person and dropped it into the package window.


It was just as he emerged from the government building that he came near stepping upon a large fire-cracker that was fusing to go off. He barely escaped the infernal thing, but got a liberal benefit of the explosion, accompanied by the yells of a score or more of Young Americas, who were richly enjoying his sudden antics. But Quaint, overlooking their audacious amusement, laughed with them, but kept a better outlook for himself afterwards.

It was another magnificent day, but promised to be somewhat warmer than Sunday had been. There were to be civic parades, games at the parks, bicycle-racing and the usual quota of accidents, of course, such as make the day one of patriotism as well as of discord and pain.

The cannonading awoke Quaint early, and in true adherence to past customs he got up and dressed. The sun had not yet left the great lake, but stood like a ball of fire upon the blue-tinted waves. Beside the cannon,

the noise of lesser artillery came from all quarters, invented, of course, by the squads of youthful aspirants whose glory consisted in vying with each other in making the most disturbance to the minute.

Rivalry was a pleasing study with Quaint, and upon this he always tried to look charitably. It was often transitory, to be sure, but it was so typical of human-kind that he believed there must be a redeeming feature in it. What, indeed, had stirred so emphatically the rugged hearts of our forefathers? Was it not to plant a republic that would outrival all other republics? They did it, at all events, and Quaint thanked his stars they did. He had been born where had been the very hot-bed of the Revolution, and of course had inherited much that used to be called patriotism. As to the patriotism of these latter days he rather hesitated. It was a day of peace — yes. Had we not outlived our fighting proclivities? Well enough, of course, to indulge in mock warfare, parades, and fireworks to honor the past, but to the truly awakened soul these even were most crude and vainglorious.



Quaint always analyzed his thoughts very critically, lest he might become one of those ubiquitous dissenters from everything. He abjured the man or woman who kicks from habit and long practice, — kicks because the world is not a little different than it is. But — and Quaint could have taken his oath he was right — he did object to war and the present methods of politicians. The live-and-let-live policy was just and unimpeachable. Then why kill at all, or fight, or even elbow one's brother out of the ring of public favor?

This morning, however, he did not draw largely upon his philosophies, but strove to look on and smile with the rest, for in a few brief hours the play spell would be over, and then work and serious things again as of yore.

It was near the middle of the day that he was sitting on a bench in Lakeside Park, still momentarily amazed at the prolonged vigor with which the day was being celebrated. Down Michigan Avenue a regiment of militia was marching and would soon pass this very point. The music of the band was truly inspiring. The regular array of striped

trousers, the moving plumes, the glistening bayonets, and the shining cannon and other accoutrements of war, — all contributed to the very creditable appearance of the solid column. An unalloyed pride sprang into our hero's susceptible heart, and though confessedly a peace advocate, he was deeply impressed with the scenic effect before him. He had not observed that a queer-looking specimen of a man had crept up and taken a seat beside him. At a certain juncture he suddenly became aware of his presence. It was a moment when the band was playing a most inspiring march. The stranger seemed depressed in spirits and wore a soft felt hat and smoked a brier pipe in somber silence. His face was pale, and his black whiskers made his skin seem still paler. His fingers worked nervously together, and other symptoms of inner disturbance rested upon his firm-set lips.

“Hang the devils!” Quaint heard him mutter, in a husky sort of tone. Now Quaint turned and looked inquiringly at him.

“Beg pardon, neighbor; but did you speak to me?” he asked.

The man smoked his pipe in an obstinate temper, and from under his low-drawn hat viewed the soldiery still more sullenly.

"I'd wipe 'em off the earth, — that 's me," again muttered the stranger, hitching nervously in his seat.

"Who, — the militia?" The man nodded ruefully. Quaint viewed his companion with a quiet compassion. How terribly forsaken he looked, now that he had given vent to his thoughts! A splendid command came just then to "shift arms!" and the very unanimity of the movement, the hundreds of bayonets obeying the word in a simultaneous flash, caused the disgruntled fellow to wince with contempt.

"Puppets of the rich! I'd hang every mother's son of 'em!" again mumbled the stranger.

Quaint detected a marked German accent in his words. He had heard of a certain disturbing element which boasted of Chicago as its headquarters, and vague surmises that this man was a component part of it flashed into his mind. The next words of the stranger fully confirmed his suspicions.

"I am an anarchist, every time. *We're* the common enemies of those scoundrels yonder."

Quaint laughed in easy surprise. "You an anarchist?" he asked. "You do exhibit a remarkable frankness in saying so."

A scowling look of inquiry sprang to the German's face. "Yes, an anarchist. What are you?"

"Me? — oh —" and Quaint hesitated. "I'm a sort of black-and-tan rebel, I suppose."

A gleam of light shot into the German's eyes. "You a rebel?" he fairly demanded. "What are you rebelling against?"


"Guns and dynamite."

The man pulled his pipe from his mouth and turned a full gaze upon Quaint. Then he reached out a sickly looking hand.

"Shake," he said. Quaint knew no way but to take the hand and give it a friendly pressure. "I say damn 'em; don't you?"

"Not exactly," smiled Quaint, as if in doubt of the sanity of the speaker.

"Why not?" and the man looked viciously disconcerted.



"Because I condemn nobody; my creed forbids it. Did you ever try that sort of doctrine?"

But the man only settled back into his former moody state. The regiment had gone by, and only the far-away beatings of the drums could be heard. Quaint would have got up and gone away in silence had the man not given him a tardy answer.

"No, I haven't tried it. Creeds as they run are milksop and contemptible. Our paper downs the churchman as a hypocrite."

"Your paper? Are you an editor?"

The man nodded and drew a revengeful puff at his pipe.

"Then let me say, my dear scribe, that you are clean off, to use the common phrase. You will never hang a single trooper, for hanging is becoming more unpopular every day. Powder and shot has virtually had its day, too. I am already looking for a general abandonment of warfare with guns; we've grown away from it, so to speak. The millennium is dead sure to come in the twentieth century. Don't you believe it?"

The man smoked his pipe in silence, but

soon shifting in his seat he knocked the ashes from it and put it away in his pocket. Some of his extreme sullenness had subsided, now that the militia had gone by, and Quaint almost imagined he saw a taint of the real scholar back of his waspish exterior.

"No, I don't believe it. Fighting is a freeman's mode of defense," he said. He at no time looked Quaint straight in the eye.

"It may have been a defense in the past, but has n't the world to-day something better to look forward to? Can we hate and kill our enemies and be happy?"

A sickly smile of unbelief came to the German's face. "Mere stuff, that," he said. "You must be one of those Salvation Army cranks; eh?" and the speaker looked at Quaint with a leer of unhappy contempt.

"See here, my friend," expostulated Quaint, squaring himself about; "if you will take a mere word from an ordinary citizen like me, I will give it to you and welcome. I believe that in the start you meant well, but a curdle has got into your milk of kindness, and life is losing its sweetness for you. Isn't that a fact?"

The man looked up in amazement. "Do you pretend to preach to *me*?" he sneered.

"Why, certainly, if you call it preaching." Quaint was a little awestruck for a second or two. Then he said with one of his warm-hearted smiles: "To be an anarchist is no slight accomplishment, and it takes some vim to proclaim it to the world; now, does n't it?" The man kept silent. "I want you to think back, if you will, to the day when you were a mere capering lad; when you played house, played marbles, played soldier, even, in the meekest of all contentment, utterly unconscious that you would ever need to become an anarchist. Your little universe was the door-yard; you needed no other. Now, should we ever cease to be children? Would you have struck down one of your playmates because he differed with you in opinion? However hot your contentions, you forgot them in a mere jiffy of time, — in short, you forgot and forgave as children do. Should we, I say, ever cease to be children? You loved without knowing it. Your doting old mother I dare say used to look down upon your playhouse with the love of heaven in

her thoughts, and yet you now choose to pose as an enemy of the commonwealth! No, you are in fact an enemy to no man, even now. Your heart would beat with the very throbs of boyhood if you would let it. Every man is your brother, every woman your sister, and the world is your playground, as of old. *I can love a man who calls himself an anarchist.*"

The German had drawn his hat down over his eyes, and had stretched his limbs out in front of him; but he listened to Quaint in silence.

"Yes, I often think of the time when we were all young," continued Quaint; "how naturally we lived, how we bounded along — we seldom walked — don't you remember it? Why did we go tripping over the ground, do you suppose? Because of the lightness of our hearts. I, for one, hope never to outgrow my childhood. I could play tag now with the vim of a boy of seven summers, and enjoy it, too. But we are apt to let the dry husks of responsibility make us stiff in the joints, and playing tag gets to be one of the lost arts. You see, don't you, how humanity can be-

come one grand brotherhood if it only would. Every man and woman living is necessary to your life at this very moment. Did you ever think of that?"

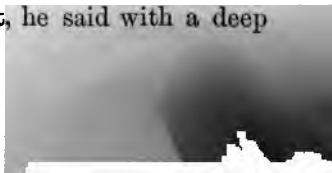
Quaint had gone on so lavishly that he had not once thought but that the German deserved the most radical treatment. It was a fact, however, that he had touched a tender spot when he alluded to the mother of his friend's boyhood; and as he ceased speaking some agitation was struggling within the man's frame. A tear was actually trickling off his burning cheek. Then to Quaint's utter astonishment the man's head dropped upon the back of the bench, and his whole frame shook with a convulsion of grief. While he wept Quaint remained silent. At last the German looked up at Quaint through forlorn and wretched tears.

"Do you believe in a God?" he asked, his voice quivering with feeling. "If there is a God I do not know it," he moaned half aloud. "There has been little happiness in the world for me!"

"Happiness?" repeated Quaint, with an almost feminine compassion. "Why, all the

happiness the world inherits is for you, but you have shut yourself from it. Once strike the keynote of harmony, and that same happiness pours into one's soul like so much sunlight. Why, indeed, should we ever look down into the utter darkness? Within us there is a living spark of the divine man. Smother it as we may, it will some time set our souls on fire; and then God needs to have pity on us if ever. My practice is to live in fondness for everybody; preach it, count every man and woman good, banish evil entirely, and, do you know, my dear sir, that that is a great help when one goes to sleep nights. It keeps up the circulation, and we save just so many expensive doctor bills;" and here Quaint laughed beamingly, as if his very soul radiated with warmth.

The first burst of grief over, the German seemed drawn most mysteriously to his counselor. His words were few, and were spoken with haste or frequent hesitation. Suddenly, and with an erratic movement, the man arose as if to go. Grasping Quaint's hand with a now friendly movement, he said with a deep tide of feeling, —




“As I live, I have never heard such words before in this great country. The very name of religion has been barren to me, the deceptions of mankind have many times stricken me dumb, and I have had kicks instead of sympathy.” Here he stopped and for the first time looked Quaint squarely in the face. “My friend,” he half murmured, in a tone of deep agitation, “you shall have my thanks. That is all I can tell you now. Here is my card; you may hear from me later;” and with this he again shook his companion’s hand and strode nervously away.

Quaint watched him turn a corner down another street, with a truly righteous amen upon his lips.

CHAPTER XVII.

QUAINT had no more than turned about when he saw, looking toward the depot-grounds, a scene of unusual commotion. Down the common at a fearful gait ran a horse hitched to a baggage-wagon, and within the wagon was a child screaming with fright and clinging desperately to the seat. In an instant Quaint's heart was in his throat, as he bounded away with all his might toward the rig. It was yet some forty rods from him, coming directly down the common. Presently, however, the horse veered and leaped the curbstone into the avenue. Many ran out and shouted to the animal, but this only seemed to terrify him and cause him to run the faster. Then instantly came a scene which thrilled our hero's sympathetic soul, and ordinarily would have taken his breath. Out from an obscure corner sprang a roughly clad news-boy, — full-grown lad, grimy knuckles, saucy



leer in his eye, daring in his every nerve — you have all seen him, I know — and in a twinkling had leaped into the very face of the running beast, had grasped the bit and there clung with the desperation of a fiend. This did little else than veer the horse into the sidewalk, but even this was something. The child, now terribly frightened, had fallen flat upon the wagon bottom, so sudden had been the concussion of the vehicle against the curb. But the mere act of the lad must have saved the child's life. With a quick clutch Quaint, who had just reached the scene, bent quickly forward and grasped the little one in his arms, just as the horse, now frenzied with terror, broke away and dashed once more down the avenue.

Hundreds of people swarmed from everywhere, and in a mere instant a large crowd had closed in upon Quaint, who still held the child in his arms. A policeman clubbed and threatened, and endeavored to clear the spot, but the pulse of curiosity was for a time too much for him. In the intense confusion the real hero of the incident was overlooked. Lying upon his back upon the sidewalk was

the newsboy, writhing with pain. It took some moments for the masses to understand that Quaint was not the real rescuer of the child. Quaint fairly shouted the facts to the officer, who, seeing the child unhurt, turned his attention to the lad. His arm was broken, for one thing, and blood was spurting from his nose. Handing the child to a bystander, Quaint bent and sought to lift the wounded lad from his position. But it took more hands than his to do it. A muscular stranger assisted him, and helped to carry him into a livery barn, away from the crowd. They laid him upon a cot and dispatched a messenger for a doctor. In the mean time Quaint's ready wit in an emergency was brought into action, and such restoratives as could be had were given to the lad, who stood his pains most heroically.

It seemed but a minute or two before an ambulance wagon reined up to the walk, and official aids were surrounding the patient. Quaint's sympathies were by this time fully aroused.

"To the city hospital," commanded the officer.

Quaint touched the policeman upon the arm. "Is there no private hospital near?" he asked. The officer looked at him in surprise. "Deuced brave lad, and he deserves the best," parried Quaint.

"It takes money —" then the policeman stopped and looked sharply at Quaint.

"Never mind that; I'll foot the bill. Let me go along;" and Quaint bent and with the help of the others carried the patient out to the ambulance.

A very solemn-looking individual got in beside Quaint and the officer; and when the door banged together, the wheels of the conveyance began their hurried rattle over the stone pavement. Quaint spoke a word to the stranger, who was doing his best to soothe the lad and ease his pain. But the man did not reply. How very devoted in his sympathies he must be! Soon Quaint spoke to him again.

"Mighty close call for the child, was n't it?"

The stranger bent his ear. He was deaf.

"I say it was a mighty close call —"

"No, not a fall, — a runaway, they told me."

Quaint smiled inwardly and held his peace until the hospital was reached. Together they assisted the boy up the steps of the building. Then Quaint turned to the officer.

“Many thanks to you, sir, for the kindness. We will attend to the case now,” he said, in reply to which the officer turned away as if his duty was ended.

Splendid care and treatment were at once given the lad, all of which did Quaint’s heart good, — any way so that he should not, after performing his act of bravery, be taken to the city hospital. Quaint had a horror of municipal charities.

When everything was seen to, Quaint drew from his inner vest-pocket, next to his generous heart, a small memorandum book, in which lay folded the Widow Stillman’s lone bank-bill. Handing the money to the matron, he said, —

“Make him comfortable while it lasts. Such mettle as the boy exhibited deserves oceans of praise. He is a genuine hero, — one of that kind, though, the world is apt to overlook.”

Then the deaf man went with Quaint down

the steps and into the street. Quaint wondered how he could talk to one so deficient in his hearing. But when they had gone a short distance the solemn man said quietly :

“ You paid the lad’s bill, I see.” Quaint nodded. “ Do it from benevolence ? ”

“ Not exactly,” spoke Quaint, quite loudly. The man had not understood him. “ Not for benevolence, exactly, — merely because it seems best.”

The stranger had now only half heard, for he looked puzzled and uncertain.

“ Lay him up a month or two, I presume,” he remarked. Then they walked on for a time in silence. Suddenly a bright idea seemed to strike him. “ To my notion, the code of heroism needs revising. I say hero, whether he be rich or poor. Don’t you ? ” Quaint smiled and nodded most gratefully. Seeing his ready indorsement, the man continued, “ I am something of a crank, myself.”

Quaint came near laughing outright, so blandly and solemnly had the speaker put the remark. But what reply could he make ? None at all.

"They say we are all a little daft on some subject or other; but if we are sane enough to admit it, why, we are at least harmless. I look at it that way," again philosophized the man, bending his ear for a reply.

"What is your particular phase?" asked Quaint. The stranger bent still closer.

"What's your phase, — reforms?"

"Reforms; yes, — public and private. We can't get too much of 'em."

Quaint smiled quite charitably. Doubtless his question had not been fully understood. Halting and getting closer to the man's ear he said loudly, —

"I asked you to name your particular phase of reform."

Now he understood, and a beaming, fatherly smile stole quietly upon his righteous countenance.

"My particular phase of reforms? Servant girls, just at present."

"I guess I am not posted," shouted Quaint, in a tone half of merriment. "Expect to reform 'em all?"

"No, not this fall. House-cleaning time in the spring is the best for operations."

Failing in this, Quaint tried his other expedient, and stopped and put his lips again to his friend's ear.

"You did not understand me. I asked you if you expect to reform the entire army of servant girls."

"Oh, I get it now," smiled the stranger, very placidly. "Nothing easier than to reform them, go at it rightly. I take it you are something of a reformer yourself." Quaint smiled his assent. "Well, I am very practical in my methods. You see, while the out-and-out servant girl is a monopolist in her way, she is the most put-upon creature living. See?" and the speaker crossed his forefingers thoughtfully. "She keeps late hours, she grows sour and resentful — why? Because she is an outcast from the send-off."

This roused no end of curiosity in Quaint's breast. He had never heard the subject alluded to before. What a city of fads was this, really! Somehow his heart was already going out toward this very, very model reformer. But what a task to talk to him! The speaker, however, seemed to get Quaint's inward response, and his eyes grew bright with fervency.

"Latterly I have invaded the public field somewhat, and have sought to make my theories practical," he said very candidly. "If you had time to go with me to my house I could show you minutely what my work is. I am now secretary of the Fort Willing Anti-Trust Building League. You have heard of us, no doubt."

Quaint shook his head.

"Well, sir, suppose you go with me — let's see — four, six, seven blocks from here — that's where I live. I will promise you rich rewards for your pains. I have something of genuine benevolence to show you. Will you go?"

Quaint nodded agreeably and smiled his thanks. Go with him? Of course he would. Where could the stranger have found a more willing observer?

Taking up the walk, his elderly friend led the way at a brisk pace, and of course little was said besides the frequent remarks made by the reformer regarding certain objects they passed on the way.

CHAPTER XVIII.


IT was a somewhat humble dwelling, rather queerly planned, neatness everywhere, and the yard was filled with a profusion of flowers. Now with a very fatherly air did the reformer turn his door-knob and admit his newly made acquaintance. He was very affable, and if anything over-mannerly and devoted. Quaint could not well have run across a more marked specimen of human-kind.

“Possibly your time is limited, so I guess I will show you around without ceremony,” he said, leading the way toward the rear of the house.

Quaint followed, and his ready eye took in everything. There was a certain ease — humble enough in its way — in each room they entered. The furniture, neatly dusted and in the best of order, showed some signs of wear, but was quite respectable withal. There were sounds of children’s voices up-

stairs. Quaint was introduced to the wife of his host, a quiet-natured matron, who took her caller's hand with reserve. But her enthusiastic spouse did not delay his ramblings. His extreme devotion to his chosen cause had put a bright light into his usually quiet orbs, and Quaint loved to watch its intensity as he unfolded his favorite theme. At last Quaint found himself in a sort of wing, or annex, a little apart from the main portions of the house.

"This," explained his guide, "is the point of interest I wished you to see. You will observe here two rooms, well furnished and comfortable. They are the parlor and bedroom—or whatever else you choose to call them—of our domestic. Other members of the family never enter here except upon invitation. Remote as these rooms may be from our living apartments, they are still in easy reach by means of a system of electric signals. The Fort Willing League, of which I told you, favors an innovation in home building even as radical as this, though I do not know of a single instance of the kind elsewhere in the city. But as our League



extends its influence, many radical improvements will be introduced, both sanitary and humane in their character."

Quaint listened to all this with a look of tearful amazement. The very spirit of his friend's philanthropic motives stirred him as nothing else had. Putting his lips again to his ear, he said with feeling, —

"Grand idea that. Was it original with you?"

The reformer's face twitched with good feeling, and his smile was altogether saintly and sublime.

"It occurred to me when talking up my house plans with the architect. In the very loft he had put the hired help, and my conscience, being just then in a susceptible state, revolted. I would have none of that, I said; so I sat about in my mind for a substitute. As I dreamed and studied, I thought better of servants, and in my moment of self-indulgence nothing seemed too good for them. Didn't they do the work? Didn't they deserve royal treatment for their services, since only their own class could or would stoop to it? I may be an extremist,

but I am bound to believe I have broken no moral or civil law."

Our hero now fairly beamed with delight, which was enough to awaken a truly lovable look in his friend's deeply animated countenance.

"Here she can receive her friends, instead of meeting them upon the street," further explained the host, still standing and smiling down upon Quaint. "Do you not see what a reform can be inaugurated everywhere? Families are to-day languishing for really good domestic help; but why? I will tell you why. When you shut a girl up in a rude kitchen, where she has worked all day, will she stay in after the moon is up? Not on general principles. I say, give her a taste of civilization, and she becomes civilized. In return she is capable of more large-hearted love for you than you can imagine. Give her neglect, and she will espouse the devil's cause nine times out of ten. This part of the house belongs to the hired help," curtly concluded the speaker, in the oddest of accents.

Quaint walked through the rooms with his native air of freedom. Here was a pretty

little fireplace nestling in one corner, a folding-bed with polished mirrors in its frame stood opposite this, a shelf or two of books, plentiful means of lighting, a few pictures upon the walls, while the cushioned rocking-chairs were enough to make any sane domestic sigh in deep relief after a day of conflict with wash-tub or ironing-board. Into the ear of his informant Quaint breathed his prayer of approval.


“A bang-up good idea, I say. That is what I call benevolence with a handle to it. I believe I should be the happiest man on earth with such a fad. Possibly you are the happiest man on earth as it is.”

The reformer smiled, then knit his brows in silence. “No, not exactly that,” he speculated. “I have never yet run across a perfectly happy mortal; have you? To be perfectly happy, one would need to be an idiot. Perhaps, though, I am a little behind the times. Hard to keep up with the day without ears to hear.”

So unexpectedly had come the oddly matched words of his friend that Quaint was more amused than ever, so he laughed from

very good-will and exuberance of spirits. Doubtless the reformer was a man of means — his house betokened this — and he did not look like a man who had to work for his living. It was needless to ask if he was a Christian. This was self-evident. Moved by one of those flashes of inspiration which occasionally come over an awakened soul, Quaint secretly vowed, then and there, that if he ever became a wedded man, he would do as this truly great man had done, rest assured. Very naturally he resolved to write a complete history of his discovery to the Widow Thorne, for she could appreciate it as no one else would, of course. It was a dream of altruism he had little expected to experience, and his being warmed as it had done on many a similar occasion.

But as the day was passing, and as his host was so hard to talk to, Quaint at length excused himself and set out for down town, full of that youthfulness which comes over one in times of perfect peace. His eccentric acquaintance, too, had given him another nut to crack. Does the truly contented man exist anywhere? As for women, he had seen



them in the stores and bazars, their sweet faces wreathed in smiles as they drank in the bewildering novelties before them, and he had called them happy. Were they that, indeed? In any event, a perfectly satisfied man must be a gem in his way, and because of the novelty of the thought, Quaint would willingly have sought even to the ends of the earth to find him.

All this was he poring over in his mind when, after having reached the down-town districts, he halted from sheer lack of purpose opposite the post-office. His eyes wandered to the man who sold shoe-strings and shirt-buttons, and who stood so statue-like from day to day plying his solemn vocation. He looked like an Italian, and he might have been a Spaniard. Was not this very son of foreign birth a man of pure content? Quaint sauntered up and looked over his stock. Then he gazed into his expressionless face.

"Shoe-strings?" he asked, as if the fact was not already apparent.

"Five ceent — seex for a qu-varter." The man was suddenly alert for a sale. Quaint shook his head, but looked the vender over a moment.

“Ever get discouraged?” he asked, with an expression of doubt. But the man only returned a mechanical grin.

“Seex for a qu-varter,” he repeated, in the same vernacular. Quaint smiled hopelessly, but since the vender could not understand, he felt safe in saying anything to him, even much that might be termed philosophic, — next thing to talking to a post, as it were. So he asked, somewhat facetiously, —

“I am just now ready to tramp the earth over to find a perfectly contented man. Do you know him?”

The man shook his head dubiously. Seemingly, he had not understood a word. Now more in a tone of musing than otherwise, Quaint continued along quite recklessly, —

“Him, I mean, who is content to let the world wag on, who eats his meals, and sings and sleeps, never goes grieving, needs no governing, no clubbing from the authorities, no iron-clad religion to save his soul, no code of ethics, no bombs to terrify the righteous, no bank account, no double-dealing, no virtue to flaunt before the public eye, — I say, seignior, where will I find him?”

Quaint ought to have been more guarded. A look of some curious inner workings came upon the man's face. It was not a smile, nor was it a grin of dismay. It seemed more like a glimmer of cunning. Giving his handful of shoe-strings a gentle shake, he said in broken English, —

“Vare you find 'im ; eh ?”

“Yes ; where does the scamp keep himself ? Where can I find him ?”

“Him blackee shoes on noder side der street.”

“Eh ?” surmised Quaint, full of quick delight. Instinctively he looked in the direction indicated. But at this the man laughed one of those meaningless, empty laughs, then returned once more to his vernacular.

“Five ceent — seex for a qu-varter !” he called forth, holding out his sleek stock of merchandise in the very presence of the busy passers-by.

With nothing else to do just then, Quaint let his eyes wander up and down the street, half as if he might expect to see the fabulous creature he had pictured to the Italian groping in some alley or stalking the highway.

Some of the noisy patriotism of the day had subsided, having doubtless run out of powder, or spent itself because of the vociferous start it had got in the early morning. Quaint believed he had never passed so eventful a Fourth of July in his life. But would a soul less prone to the drift of human life have celebrated the day just as he had done? Possibly not.


CHAPTER XIX.

SUPPOSE, for the sake of brevity, we omit a portion of our hero's Western trip, — that portion which, if amplified, might fill volumes, — and a couple of months later imagine him eastward bound. Though it always seemed like an act of self-deprivation for Quaint to leave Chicago, what he had experienced this time must certainly go a great way toward his education into liberal thought. The very atmosphere of the town is so ample, so unrestricted and independent, that the Eastern man who is about to awaken from his dreams of inanition can find no better place in which to be resurrected. Quaint found much of this same spirit of energy farther west. He had but to open his eyes, and the lesson was before him. Denver, with its hurried growth, San Francisco, with its wealth of liberal thought, have developed phases of civilization which our hero could not help

imbibing with the readiness of a modern savant.

How grateful becomes the loyal soul who realizes the truly wonderful day in which we live! Invention, progress in thought, new modes of travel, everything which makes life dear, surround us; yet is it not a fact that some do let their eyes droop in morbid silence, and mope, and look upon the earth as a vale of tears, and grow despondent, even in the midst of all that is encouraging?

Like gems set in the background of his every-day experiences, had been the frequent tidings Quaint had received from his friends in Greensward. Each added letter from the Widow Thorne seemed to transcend the former one in its certain glow of wisdom and warmth of wording. Quaint had lived a lifetime in them already. He had written much to her that he had never supposed himself capable of putting upon paper, and thus had he learned rapidly the secret of the inner self. Certain it was that he had never looked upon the gentler sex with so much adoration. Had the average woman of the world ever been credited with so much wisdom of the



heart? Perhaps he had never taken the time to think about it. This one invaluable friend of his may have been a rare exception among women. Her beliefs, her conceptions of things, frequently hidden from the ordinary mind, were at all times truly sincere and just. Problems which Quaint set before her, which, because of his peculiar contact with the world, forced themselves upon his vision, she weighed loyally and well. Her letters had come to him more frequently of late, and because of her depth of soul, they were free from idle cant and wholly dispassionate.

Quaint had continued to find trade good, for, indeed, was he not now living in a new sphere of understanding and purposes? As we go deeper into ulterior things, the surface struggle for subsistence grows less formidable. We work with new methods, new light gives us heart, and, toiling not with the vision of Self uppermost, we master our destinies with greater ease, and thereby find time to grow in other ways than in material wealth. This is life, indeed.

These facts considered, can we blame our

hero when, having crossed the Empire State, he did not choose to leave Albany direct for Boston? His burning desire was to make a brief *détour* through Gotham and up the Sound. Can we, we repeat, blame Quaint for this single indulgence?

As he entered the land of his forefathers his soul warmed with mellowness. The smooth highways, the neatly painted farm-houses, the well-to-do premises everywhere, restful, orderly, and attractive, gave him an inner pleasure which he richly enjoyed. His boyhood had been spent amid these very scenes, and it seemed like home to him again. But never before had he traveled eastward with so many inward emotions. Even as the train went dragging itself up the Connecticut shore, a pang of intense expectation possessed him, — the first time in his life when there came a tugging at his heart over which he had not some degree of mastery. Men like Quaint live at a terrific speed. Years do not count for much. They live by events, not years, as the spirit is said to live in other realms. Every familiar object he passed, the very glimmer of the waters of the Sound,

served to add to his heart-throbs till a fever-heat rested upon his temples. When the carriage rattled over the pebbly brook, the trickling waters in its shiny bed seemed purer and more than ever like molten crystal.

Arriving once more at the old gate before the Stillman cottage, he found himself in a whirl of contending emotions. With the impetuosity of youth he lifted the latch and walked through. Up at the still quiet house he gazed, and strove to collect himself. But his fervid glance would have betrayed him, even then.

Instantly his heart stood still. An apparition of reality blinded him for a mere second. It was a sight that would have stirred the soul of the most callous man. In a setting of delightfully green foliage he saw the face of his adored. Her head was bowed, while her delicate fingers were arranging some pretty pink blossoms into a bouquet. But this was not all. At her side sat a young man of handsome demeanor and exquisitely dressed. He was reading from a book, and so near had Quaint come that his words were almost audible to him. On the widow's face was a

charming look of enjoyment. From her attendant's eyes also came forth a gleam of the deepest appreciation. What a picture of mutual content! For several seconds our hero stood like one transfixed. So deep were his powers of concentration that the fullest sense of the situation flashed quickly upon him. Had he a right to intrude? A sweet womanly smile and a flush of feeling, like that of a person living in ecstasies, had just flitted across the beautiful listener's face. The book must have held the secret of all this, — the charm of utter forgetfulness and exquisite pleasure. Or was it only the companionship of a congenial spirit at her side? Had Quaint a right to be jealous? None at all. Even she who was all perfection in his eyes still had her freedom in her own keeping. But it took a stout heart to reason thus. Quaint seemed just now incapable of reasoning. If he could only have arrived at a less critical moment! Must he now, like Enoch Arden, turn disconsolately away and disappear forever? Where were his magnificent philosophies, his boasted tolerance, his love of freedom for every living creature? But to

act even at all was extremely difficult. He was compelled to await the abatement of his first surprise before he could move a muscle.

Meanwhile the picture before him grew intensely lovable. An artist could have caught therein a hint of spiritual meaning. But would an artist, even, have beheld the two with our hero's breadth of vision? How spasmodic are our emotions, our little worldly flutterings, our limited resources! Even in real life come moments very like distempered dreams. There is a clash, a dart of pain, an awakening, — then it is all over. We are many times amazed to find our disturbance only a dream indeed.

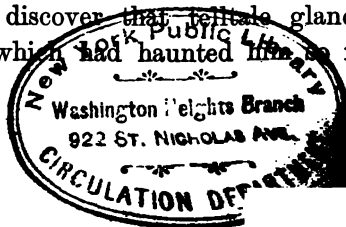
But a mysterious resolve came suddenly upon Quaint, and he drew a long breath of new courage. It was a reaction of the moment, — that unit of time in which we must act instantane. Up the path he stepped and approached the grotto. As if his very fate were to be decided, he kept his gaze fixed upon the widow's face. So intently were the two occupied that not until he was a few feet away was he recognized. A confused smile of surprise at first, then a movement of happy

welcome, and Mrs. Thorne had arisen with an outstretched hand of greeting. So warm was her grasp ~~that~~ a rush of thanksgiving came into Quaint's wayward heart. What cared he now for a thousand rivals?

"I am so glad you have come just at this time," she said, with a glow of perfect womanhood. "Mr. Crippen, my brother Ralph. I was saying only an hour since that I wished Ralph could meet you."

With a smile of genial complaisance the young man arose and shook Quaint's hand of ready friendship. Could a happier change have come over the spirit of his dreams? After all, do we not spend much vital force upon the ever-shifting appearances of our lives? Quaint was supremely happy now, if never before in his life.

Following the introduction, and when Ralph Stillman turned to pick up his book, Quaint could not resist the opportunity to clasp again the hands of his adored, and look deep into her expressive, earnest orbs, as if to ask some silent question. It took but a mere instant to discover ~~that telltale~~ glance of assurance which ~~had haunted him~~ so many



times upon his travels. One simple act more would have fulfilled their greeting quite. Could their lips but have met for the first time, how fitting would have been this brief moment of mutual enjoyment! But no, it was that same adherence to propriety which forbade even this lawful impulse of Nature, and in another second it was too late. In all truth, though, their spirits had approached each other much nearer than Quaint could ever have dreamed, so nearly in the same mental orbit had they been moving. It was a mere glance at best, but it was enough to assure him that his dream of her had been in no wise too lofty or idealistic.

With a quick movement she released her hands from his, then turned to her brother Ralph.

"Won't you please go and overtake Alice, and tell her who is here?" she said, in a most sisterly tone.

Ralph of course started to do her bidding. Alice could be seen wheeling the baby cab down the highway not a great distance away.

"And so you have come back to us?" questioned Mrs. Thorne, smiling as she led

the way toward the house. "You have arrived at the very culmination of our season of great enjoyment. Brother Ralph has been with us two weeks now, and such a delightful visit have we had! Yet a shadow of regret comes with it all, nevertheless, for to-morrow morning Ralph starts for the West again. The time has been all too short."

"Yes, indeed," spoke Quaint, sympathizingly. "In our finite existences we run upon these time-limits everywhere. They make us hurry to catch trains, cut our visits short, and give us no end of trouble of one kind and another. But pray tell me, how have you all been? and has Baby Ruth grown? and do you still enjoy your home as much as ever? and have you felt at all bored by my letters, and, most of all, will you tell me," fairly beamed Quaint, "if earth still remains a veritable heaven to you?"

The widow smiled at such extravagant questioning.

"Yes, as I go deeper into the meaning of life, I find the real heaven we have been discussing. It is not so difficult of discovery, after all," she said trustingly.

A beautiful flush had suffused her cheeks, and the warm glance she gave to Quaint was one of truth indeed. They had approached the house porch, upon which sat Widow Stillman, knitting, and enjoying the shadows of a most superb afternoon.

"Mother!" called out Eleanor; "who do you suppose has come?"

Mrs. Stillman looked quietly up, and a very genial smile lighted her still comely features. After a life of self-training she had quite outgrown any approach to emotional acts. So with a gentle air of good-breeding she arose and gave Quaint her hand. Eleanor brought out some chairs, and the trio were soon seated and talking together with much of their former cordiality.

Ere long Ralph and Alice came up the walk, the latter shaking hands much after the fashion of girls who would rather blush than speak a word. It may have been a little sudden for Quaint, but, forgetting propriety for the instant, he fairly caught up Baby Ruth and began showering a series of impulsive caresses upon her, much to this infantile creature's dismay at first. How pretty and sweet

she looked in her dress of lace, and dimples in both her ruddy cheeks ! Quaint appeared fairly boyish over her many charms, but since his privilege was a lawful one (so, the world over, they say) he seemed bent upon bestowing all the affection upon the defenseless babe which he would have liked to proffer its saintly parent.

With another male member present, it did not take long to break over the barriers of the strictest etiquette. Ralph and Quaint were friends at once, and a very harmonious group they were, indeed. Till tea time they talked, — rambling talk, mostly, which was frequently shifted by the merest caprice during the fleeting moments. Quaint forgot all else in his sumptuous way of living in the happy present. Had the world been coming to an end the next week, he would have given it not the slightest thought. An unchained spirit feels no limit of time or space.




CHAPTER XX.

WE have just said that because there was another male member in the household, things took on an easier aspect all around. It seemed the most natural thing in the world for Quaint to accept the hospitality of his friends for the night, instead of seeking a hotel as on previous occasions. Secretly he was in raptures over the opportunity, for it was many a day since he had tarried all night on private premises.

Under a bright lamplight they took tea in the spacious dining-room, Ralph Stillman doing the paternal honors with fitting grace. The occasion seemed altogether impromptu, and for this reason was all the more enjoyable. For the time Mrs. Stillman unbent somewhat, and frequently laughed with the rest over the occasional flashes of humor which cropped out here and there in the conversation. There was no time for moralizing, so Quaint regaled his friends with several of

his choicer anecdotes, each of which of course bubbled over with mirth and off-hand sentiment. Ralph was now a Westerner, in love with the West, hence he could readily appreciate Quaint's interpretations of the crudities of a civilization so wonderfully forward and assuming. Didn't the great prairies and mountain passes fairly teem with enterprise, — monstrous failures and successes along with the rest? The poor buffalo had actually been exterminated to satisfy insatiate cravings for adventure, and the very wilderness of the hills and gorges, rich with ore and adventure, had lured many a poor ninny to his death, or to sullied riches, perhaps, whichever way the fickle goddess might elect.

The entire conversation that evening proved one thing; namely, that the grouping of several truly congenial minds cannot always be brought about by human planning. Such things come apparently by chance; and yet is it not all a part of the divine plan, even then? Quaint had already made a fast friend of Ralph Stillman, who himself was the embodiment of truthfulness and well-balanced perceptions.



Alice had crept off to bed, the babe lay sleeping in its crib, the hour was getting late, and yet the talk went on as if time was of little moment. But the prudence of Mrs. Stillman at last showed itself, and bedtime for the adults was agreed upon soon after the old clock in the corner had struck the hour of eleven. Mrs. Thorne had just carried her babe up to her own room, when her mother called to her to take a lamp into Mr. Crippen's apartment, and see that everything was in order there. Then with fond good-nights Quaint was shown the stairs and directed to the first room to the right, and then up into the regions of sleep he went with a thankfulness truly befitting the royal guest that he was.

But what queer pranks was destiny playing upon him, really! Another picture suddenly broke upon his vision which made his heart leap with emotion, for there, under his mellow lamplight, stood his adored, arranging the tidies upon the dresser, the towels upon the racks — and — ought he to intrude so fearlessly with not so much as an apology upon his lips? How truly happy she seemed, how gracefully she moved about, and how

dutifully was she performing her task — ah, yes, an angel in human guise! An angel? why, to be sure. How naturally she colored at the temples when her guest appeared unexpectedly at the door! Past him she would have fled, but for a single act of Quaint's. He caught her two hands, and gave a searching look into her eyes. With womanly sense she did not struggle to free herself, but returned his look with the most creditable steadfastness of motive.

“Eleanor!” he said half desperately, for this was the first time he had dared to address her thus, “do I deserve all this happiness, this generous welcome, and royal treatment? Tell me this, my dear one,” he said, now lavishly impulsive in his words, and speaking lowly so as not to be overheard; “it may be fate with me — who knows? I could tell you worlds more were you willing to listen — a secret until it is put into words — can you guess it? — and yet — ”

Quaint stopped short, for some mighty resistance checked him and made him a coward. A calm light of deference came to him from the earnest gaze of his friend, but somehow there

came with it also a forbidding and almost mysterious silence. For several long, rapturous seconds their glances met, during which a revelation came to Quaint. His sudden emotion receded, and instantly he found himself living in a realm of ideal love, passionless, honorable love, such as only true womanhood can kindle in the soul of him who is just. Not a word in answer to his queries, but still womanly she made as if to withdraw her hands from his.

“Let me go, please,” she said lowly, and yet with a tone of quiet assurance. “Good-night.”

Like a man whose will was in bondage, Quaint slowly released her, but made a slight feint as if to exchange a mere kiss, — that seal of human kinship so often passed in thoughtlessness between friends, — but even here he met a barrier most insurmountable. In another instant she had turned about, and only the light tread of her step upon the stairs was left him. In a dream he closed his door and stood speechless at his bedside. What wondrous light was breaking in upon him! Was the love he had just sought to

express of heaven or of earth? As he thought of earth there came a rush of self-reproach into his brain.

“Pshaw!” thought he; “I am the rankest of cowards. No, not that—it’s decency—decency—yes, circumspect, immaculate decency—only that. I do believe my ship will yet sink under this weight of self-righteous propriety,—simon-pure propriety, engendered in an age of alleged refinement and good-breeding. That was a glorious opportunity—and yet—no man would have dared—”

Cutting short the thought, he flung himself into a chair and dreamed as only a man of his kind can dream. In the midst of his musings he looked casually about him and noted the exquisite taste and refinement of everything in the room. How it warmed his soul to know that the fates had been thus kind to him! The atmosphere of this home was fine,—delicately fine and restful,—no more like the gross interior of a hotel than daylight is like darkness. All this was a revelation to Quaint, and no mistake.

Presently he espied hanging upon the wall



a somewhat faded photograph. A pert little miss was sitting upon a stool holding a queerly constructed doll, while another forlorn member of her nursery sat limp at her side. Nothing in any way grotesque ever escaped Quaint's notice. Was not this an early picture of the real mistress of his heart who had just eluded him? Yes, that same high forehead, those motherly lips, those eyes not yet schooled to hide a secret, — that must truly have been Eleanor Thorne in the pristine loveliness of her childhood, about the age, perchance, when she discovered her future husband in the foliage of the tree.

While Quaint gazed at this he dreamed still more absently, — dreamed and meditated, until his eyes at last wandered unconsciously to an aged portrait upon the opposite wall. What a change of vibratory action came upon him now! It was a picture of some puritanic New Englander, — high cravat, standing collar, and gaze that almost froze Quaint's susceptible heart as he took in the length and breadth of the face, so full of human tranquillity and purpose. The eyes were looking down upon him most seriously. They seemed

to say, "Young man, are you crazy? Can't you go a little slow and bide your time?" These words they said to him as plainly as if he had heard them with his mortal ears. While the first effect was upon him he seemed unable to escape the instinctive presence of this portrait. There was a deeply religious, just, dead-in-earnest expression of respectability in the face, which rebuked Quaint's littleness of soul. His only relief was to undress and put out his light, and thus escape the vision, for he had become seriously alarmed lest his happiness might suddenly topple and fall under the eyes of this his unknown censor. Could it be a portrait of Eleanor's father? Quaint tried in vain to imagine a spirit of loveliness like Mrs. Thorne as the daughter of one so chillingly austere, so mutely aggressive, and yet so justly grand and unyielding withal.

But for this last picture Quaint would have fallen asleep as a man truly in love might have done, in a bed of roses. As it was, he found himself still awake and engaged in rambling, broken thoughts when the old clock below struck twelve.

CHAPTER XXI.

MORNING, — an amber-dyed, hazy, radiantly glorious autumn morning, the sunrise a ruddy triumph of itself, the sky of clearest blue, the air just a little tempered with frost, the trees on the hilltops clothed in garments of red and yellow, while the salt sea air, which swept gently up from the Sound, conveyed a quickening sense of the real to our hero as he stood surveying the wonders of Nature from a neighboring hilltop, whereon he had stopped to rest a moment. All truly awakened souls love the morning. There is promise in the very oncoming of the sunbeams as they creep upwards in the eastern horizon.

Quaint had arisen early, and, leaving the house quietly, had begun his stroll with the alertness and vigor of youth. He loved to turn his face to the east and breathe in the splendors of the dawning day. He could have shouted if for no other purpose than to

set in quicker motion the teeming vibrations about him. In the colors of the sunrise he heard music — strange, weird music — such as one hears with his soul's inner ears. The lower world was for the time shut out, and, somewhat crudely, perhaps, he saw what the slothful never see.

Quaint truly adored the morning. Down the Sound plodded the white-winged vessels, bearing their burdens of merchandise. How he smiled as he thought of the human kin which guided them ! Day in and day out the same ceaseless struggle for just a mere breath of life, and then, — well, will a struggle for the mere dribblets of fortune ever work one's very salvation ? Yet the iron hand of trade, unrelenting and mighty though it be, must toil ever on, that human hearts may feel the need of struggling ; else there would be no victory. Quaint wondered what this whole contest of civilization on our planet was for, — why the great universe, even, had been created, if a mere right to live and breathe must be wrested from the clods of an ungrateful, often chilling orb like ours. A bird came and perched upon a twig beside

him. It twittered and sang as if there were no winter ahead. Who taught the little thing such notes of gladness? Quaint could have laughed from very joy, so subtile was the lesson before him. Could not the heart of him who toils be as light? Never quite as light, for the birds belong to Nature's choir of songsters. We are human, merely.

For more than an hour did Quaint continue his morning stroll. Brisk walks up wooded slopes, then down to the water's edge did he go, to watch the playful waves break upon the beach. But warned at last of the passing moments, he quit dreaming and bent his steps toward the Stillman cottage. He lifted the gate latch and walked through. Some faded asters caught his eye, and he stepped toward an opening in the hedge to pick them. Here he discovered another unexpected apparition of loveliness. She of his choice stood quietly clipping some yet green foliage to complete a bouquet she had been gathering. On her cheeks was a glow of health supreme, while a look of utter forgetfulness rested upon her features. Quaint's heart leaped with pride and renewed adora-

tion. It seemed almost a pity to disturb her early worship, — worship, doubtless, as much so as his own had been. But the impulse to speak to her proved too much for him.

“Culling the summer remnants, I see,” he called out, his voice seeming to send a tremor over the crisp atmosphere. Eleanor started, but turned a pleasant smile upon him.

“And are you out so early, then?” she said in response.

Quaint advanced and took her hand in his. “To be strictly proper I shall need to ask your pardon for my want of ceremony this morning,” he said; “but it is a fixed habit with me. I have been over yonder watching the sunrise. It was every bit glorious, I can assure you.”

“And how much people do miss by late rising!” said Mrs. Thorne, with a sweeping gaze up at the now brilliant horizon. “One feels the very pulsations of light and breath everywhere; and yet there are souls who seldom look up, even then.”

“I know it; they walk the earth in their sleep, and if you attempt to awake them they recoil within themselves like

shellfish. I like the soul with wings, then give it a universe of ether to roam about in, and away it flies, with the readiness that a duck takes to the water. That is my interpretation of freedom. When I imprison a bird in a cage I link my own existence with his; we are both captives in a measure."

Eleanor smiled at her friend's queer phrases, they were so startlingly unconventional and yet so logical. They walked along the paths of gravel toward the house, Quaint offering to carry a portion of the flowers. Not far from the house stood an old work-bench, doubtless as aged as work-benches are which carry so successfully the marks of many years. Upon this they laid the flowers and ferns, and like two children began together arranging the bouquet. Eleanor seemed most radiantly pleased, Quaint as bountifully conscious of his own happiness as any mortal could well have been.

"To give the bird its freedom, — what then?" asked Mrs. Thorne. The tardiness of her question brought Quaint back to his last remark.

"Oh, it takes its freedom — after a fashion.


Not being trained to it, its wings tire and it longs for its bondage — poor thing! — like many a human being whose spirit knows little else.”

“And should we have freedom always?”

“Certainly; freedom to *be*, freedom to *know*, and if one is to breathe at all, let it be a breath of air straight from the heavens. Why, if a person was to imagine one-half the actual bondage in which our poor, emaciated society is living to-day, would he dare call it life? A married man is a culprit who cringes and fears to live a life of perfect freedom, — that freedom, I mean, which cements his love with that of his connubial partner through all time. The religious devotee is in bondage who looks to the minister for his spiritual salvation. The veriest criminal within prison walls is freer than the slave to personality in any sense.”

“And you get all this in your observations on the road?” guessed the widow.

“Yes, partly. Somehow — I don’t know but I am a born heretic — possibly I am;” and Quaint thought a moment. “But you, my dear woman, can *you* tolerate a bigot chained



to his idols?" At this he looked up from his work with a masterful assurance. Eleanor smiled at the abruptness of the question.

"I can tolerate him, — yes. He has his period of servitude to live out before he can be free. That bit of balsam," she said, holding the flower out before her, "was once an idea merely. Now it is a flower. In a few days it will be a remembrance only. I believe we live in stages. We are bound to the lower before we can attain to the higher. How charitable this makes one, even toward a world like ours!"

Quaint drank in these words with all his soul. The frank, open gaze of his adored contained the fullest verification of her words. The bouquet, which filled the vase to its utmost, was now quite complete, not as symmetrical as it might have been, perhaps, had she arranged it alone, but it would doubtless do, as their first co-existing creation.

"I like flowers," remarked Quaint, surveying the bouquet with an almost boyish satisfaction. He seemed for the moment to be conscious of nothing beside the regal tints of the tiny petals and the green tufts of fili-

gree about them. "Once when a youngster, and when I was playing in our door-yard, I fell into a rather eccentric state of mind, during which I wondered then and there what unusual thing I might do upon the spur of the moment. Taking the first thought which came into my mind, I made a curious resolve. I singled out a puny stalk of joint-grass, — this I chose, possibly because of its forlornness, its native wickedness as a noxious weed, — and after saying a queer little incantation over it, I made a vow that never, so long as I lived, would I forget this one insignificant, much-belabored creature of the Omnipotent. I would not only never forget it, but at all times when out with Nature I would recall it to mind, just for the oddity of the thing. To-day a blade of joint-grass is as holy in my sight as a rose."

"Just as holy, else its life principle would have been lacking, and then it would not have been at all," agreed Eleanor. "A blade of grass is as much a proof of infinitude as a planet. Its possibilities are boundless."

Thus ran the talk pleasantly along until breakfast time. In the centre of the dining-

table they set the bouquet, then all gathered once more around the hospitable board, genial spirits still after the few short hours of sleep.

When the time drew near for Ralph Stillman to depart for the West, Quaint with ready tact held himself somewhat aloof from the others, thus letting his presence be felt as little as possible. Like a true philosopher, he kept silent on behalf of those around him who had an unpleasant duty to perform. Breaking home ties is no light task among earth's lovers of home. The mother's low-spoken words of counsel, the sisters' warming embrace, and then the last words of adieu. Ah, yes ; could the family group only be forever united ! But such would not be life. Change is the order of growth.

Eleanor was the last to throw her arms about her brother's neck and kiss his honest lips ; and when the carriage at last rattled away she turned and covered her eyes in weeping. It was only human, and our hero casually observed the quality of her grief. It was more like a passing dart of pain, which was to be bathed in the lotion of perfect, trustful love.

Possibly this was the happiest day Quaint had spent since his boyhood. Over the familiar nooks and crannies they roamed once more, gathering autumn leaves and discussing their philosophies, which now possessed them both, body and soul. The Widow Stillman looked on and smiled quietly. The day was coming off warm and summer-like again, so she sat in her favorite corner on the piazza, dreaming and knitting. It was heaven to such as she even to live. To souls less contented it is in some degree a bondage.

CHAPTER XXII.

EVENING. It was phenomenally warm, — one of those nights which precede a sudden unlooked-for disturbance in the weather. The dusky shadows had quite enveloped the Sound, a refreshing breeze was stirring, and the few spectral lights out upon the water, together with the lights in the cottages and in the neighboring town, and these, too, with the myriads of stars in the heavens, which would soon lose their brilliancy because of the full moon just peeping above the horizon, — all these made the hour one of deepest interest to both Quaint and his friend, as they strolled down to the beach for a talk wholly by themselves.

The ruins of a fisherman's cottage stood a short distance up from the shore, and toward this Eleanor led her guest. It had evidently been built in an early day, of cobblestones and log rafters ; and now, windowless and deserted,

it looked weirdly remote from the newer growth of civilization about it. What might once have been an arbor stood against the crumbling walls, and beside this, in full view of the Sound, was a stone seat of rude and ancient proportions. This seat they very naturally took, and for a time looked silently out upon the water. They had talked of the arts, of religion, and of their travels, but for some reason they had not talked of love. Must a theme so sacred as this find expression only in words?

“I feel pretty sure of one thing,” Quaint said, breaking the silence a little abruptly. “Life is a merry sort of quickstep, and if one has an ear trained to music the dance comes natural — to some it does — not to all, by any means. Many do not keep the step by long odds. They who do not must needs be put into strait-jackets, or an iron-bound code of morals is recommended for them, or even a fear of perdition or annihilation is howled into their ears with that kind of grim humor which gives one the shivers. I can tell by a man’s laugh whether he be living or dead. Can’t you?”

Eleanor was becoming quite used to her friend's queer phrases, but at these last remarks she was scarcely able to suppress a smile. For herself, she was feeling seriously thoughtful within, the hour was so peaceful and her happiness had been so complete and doubly real to her of late.

"But life is never so dear as when we are living it rightly," she said, in quiet reflection. "Some shrink when death approaches; but what is that compared to the loss of one's power of knowing how to live? When I was a child I trusted and waited for the years to come, I knew not why. To-night I can look back upon childhood and wonder why I was so trustful."

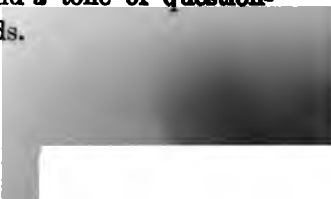
"You saw then with the natural eye; to-night your maturer vision may be in a measure dimmed by doubt and uncertainty," reasoned Quaint, quite warmly. "Better by far that we always remain children."

"And yet you say we are to scale the heights of the universe even then?"

"Certainly; there is always an elderly parent of wisdom to lead us on. By children I mean that we stay natural, live outside the

pale of anybody's self-styled creed or sanction, and sleep as children sleep after a day of romping. I do not indorse a frenzy of fine manners to the exclusion of rosy cheeks and merry laughter. We should know from within what is right. For instance: the first time we met, manners rather than good sense might have possessed me, might have made me diffident, and perhaps have denied me all this little universe of pleasure I have since passed through. But by obeying a single impulse of folly I actually took up this thread of my existence, and now have I so much as a right to believe I did a wrong?"

"No, not a wrong, surely. You would have been cruel to have let the opportunity go by. I believe it was to be," murmured Eleanor. There was a spirit of dreamy contemplation in the very atmosphere about them. Almost unconsciously Quaint let his hand clasp her palm, which lay idly at her side. With his last remark she felt the slight pressure with added effect. But she did not speak again at once. When she did a tone of questioning came into her words.



"I have a love for the benefactors of the race, those who clothe themselves in the purple and fine linen of the churches, or even those who do not," she said confidently. "Are we not apt to find them more frequently in the churches?" she asked, with an exalted innocence.

"Yes, sometimes — sometimes —" dreamed Quaint, abstractedly. "But the first essential of Christianity is forgetfulness of self," he added, with sudden spirit. "He is a benefactor indeed who can down the old Adam within him and love his enemies as we are told to do in the Sacred Book. But after this has been done, the unerring initiate needs but to consult the inner man, act honestly, even to bluntness, if needs be, and after that I wouldn't snap my finger for a faith more unqualifiedly enduring. Every time I run across a man of that stamp I slap him familiarly on the back and take his hand and give him one of my blindest, most bewitching smiles. If I have n't as much religion as he, I think all the more of him. We rarely find pearls on the streets, now, do we? — yet Christians are more numerous than pearls, of

course. But Christians after my idea do not walk the streets in platoons."

"I am beginning to wonder what is your belief — your faith or your religion — whatever one might call it," laughed Eleanor, with a pleasant tone of inquiry. "Should I be asked to-morrow what you are, what should I say?"

"What should you say? Well, really, I can hardly conceive."

"What ought I to call you, I mean?"

"Oh, I understand you now. Call me a man if you think me worthy of it — no more nor less — only that. God never intended me for anything else, though it is hard to be that at all times nowadays. Let the numberless creeds all go, I say. Then we can better be men and women merely, — easier to be honest, easier to love our neighbors and stop fighting. We could then all espouse a religion of the heart without calling it religion. Name a dogma, and it plays the mischief with us, off and on. I profess nothing and love everybody, — sometimes with a vengeance, to be sure; but it is better to love than to hate, even if one appears to a disadvantage occasionally. Don't you believe it?"

“Your words remind me of a pleasant recollection I have of this very spot when I was in my teens,” spoke Eleanor, still quite seriously. “Benny Tubbs lived in this hut, and was a queer mortal, and so was his wife. Aunt Hetty, as everybody called her, told fortunes, and one night after school I remember stopping on my way home to see her, and, do you know, we sat on this very seat and talked for a whole hour or more. There was a certain peculiar charm about her which we children could not resist. She looked into my palm that night, and smiled. She told me some remarkable things, — prophecies concerning my future and the like; but in my childish inaptitude I passed them over with scarcely a second thought. Later in life some of them came back to me.”

“And she told you — ”

“Oh, nothing very definite, — that I would bear up bravely under misfortunes, for one thing.”

“That came true, I am sure,” assented Quaint. “Do you know why I say this? Perhaps I may be mistaken, but have you not taken the loss of your husband most philosophically?”

"I trust I have."

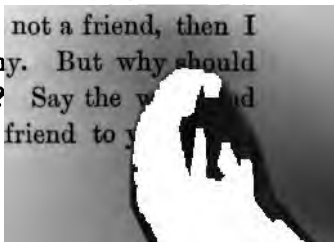
"And did not so much as put on mourning, even, like the fond, good soul that you are?"

"I do not believe in it. Somber apparel is never a token of respect for the departed. Our life together was beautiful, though short, and it would not become me to cast shadows upon it even now. If ever one needs to live in sunshine it is during the hours of adversity; after that it is too late to put on widow's weeds. Picture a sorrow to others, and it reflects back upon one with added weight."

"Magnificent thought that!" breathed Quaint, now taking the widow's hands in both his own. What possible discovery of her whom he now loved with all his soul could yet be waiting him?

"Aunt Hetty told me, too, that I would never fail to find friends in times of need. Was it not so in our particular case?"

"Emphatically so; if not a friend, then I am at a loss to know why. But why should I be content with that? Say the word and I will be more than a friend to you."



remember my attempt to convince you last night — but you put me off. May I now finish telling you — ”

“I understood you, even last night,” she said with suppressed feeling. “You do not need to tell me all.”

“Then am I to be more than a friend, — a lover?” Quaint seemed like one inspired, but startlingly impetuous. His arm stole quickly about her waist, and he trembled lest she might repulse him as she had done before. But for a moment or two they only breathed together in silence.

“Yes — if you are fitted for it,” she said, at length. Quaint’s heart, so aglow with love at this, bounded and throbbed with ecstasies.

“Let me prove that to you as I may; I can wait,” he almost implored. In an impulse of insane rapture he drew her to him. It was a supreme moment, — one which philosophers have ever failed to define in full. For the first time their lips met in daring and mutual response. Could it have been otherwise? Some tide of feeling that Eleanor could not account for swept over her, — a wave of inten-

sity like the letting go of her very nerve-force for some new and thrilling sensation. What could it mean? Though the feeling of strangeness lasted but a flash of time, what mysterious significance must it have had? With the purest soul-love, even deeper than he had ever before experienced, Quaint held her closely to him. She did not struggle to free herself. Who, indeed, shall be gifted with the wisdom to give to the world the exact analysis of a kiss? It may have been in this instance a consecration of the highest quality of earthly love, sacred, lawful, confiding love, a love which, because of its depths, denotes the real marriage solemnized under the law of heaven.

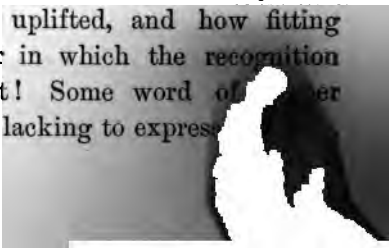


CHAPTER XXIII.

It was past ten o'clock when they left the beach and strolled back toward the Stillman cottage. How blissfully passed the moments, now that their spirits were in contact! Knowing Quaint as we do, we can overlook his seeming haste in thus bringing his love-matters to a climax. A society chap might perhaps have approached the desired goal with fine gradations of both words and manners, but Quaint was too heartily in earnest in all he did to brook delay. In some things he was systematic, thoroughly so in regard to business, though his systems, as we already know, were largely original with him. They consisted of push, mostly, with a sprinkling of generous impulse thrown in, which almost invariably turned out well. In this siege of love-making he was proving himself a most capable follower of Cupid.

Mrs. Stillman and Alice having retired,

the house was quiet throughout. Turning on the lamp, Eleanor sent a warm glow of cozy light about the sitting-room. In an old-fashioned cradle in one corner of the room slept Baby Ruth. It was the same cradle in which Mrs. Stillman's children had been reared, hence the pleasant memories surrounding it were innumerable. Quaint and his lady-love looked in unison upon the sleeping infant, each with eyes of fervent devotion. Then their glances met in uplifting, silent appeal. Tears of joy sprang to the mother's eyes, which moved Quaint's stout heart with some sudden and mighty feeling. He took her hand and led her to the cradle, and as if it were the most natural thing in the world, both kneeled and pressed the dimpled, chubby fists with worshipful reverence. Thus the trinity became one. An angelic smile that moment flitted across the baby's face. Into the eyes of his adored Quaint looked with all his soul. What ecstasy to be thus spiritually uplifted, and how fitting seemed the hour in which the recognition had come about! Some word of deeper meaning seemed lacking to express



now so beautiful and passionless. A simple sentence forced itself to his lips.

“Trust me, dearest; I will make my life worthy of it. To me a pure woman’s trust is angelic.”

He felt a throb of emotion through the hand he held. Through her tears she looked up at him with a woman’s abiding faith. Then in an impulse of perfect love she bent quickly forward and implanted a kiss upon his forehead.

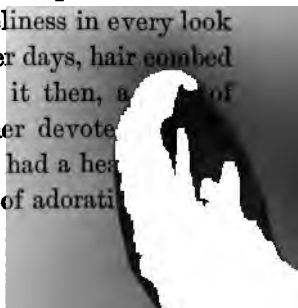
“I will trust you always — always,” she repeated. Her words came laden with that implicit, yielding confidence which only the truest of souls are capable of.

With still united impulse both arose, and Quaint, now no longer restrained from being himself, flung his arms about his adored and once more kissed her pretty mother-lips. It was a long, fervent, and unyielding embrace. While they stood thus, both let their glances fall once more upon Baby Ruth. She was sleeping the sleep of health and harmony. Could a mother ever have felt the depths of a more perfect love, a lover a more complete proof of the unity to which two hearts can attain?

Under the lamplight they sat until late and talked as lovers do. The clock had just told forth the hour of eleven, when a thought came to Quaint which touched him deeply. So near had they approached each other that Eleanor seemed almost capable of responding to his thoughts before he uttered them.

"Do you know, my dear," he said, smoothing back the tresses from her brow, "that my mother in heaven may be a witness to all this? Let me show you her picture."

From his side coat-pocket he drew forth an old medallion portrait which he always carried with him. Eleanor took the picture and looked earnestly upon it. Quaint watched the look of womanly light grow gradually upon her countenance. With an almost childish simplicity she lifted the portrait to her lips and kissed it. A great tear of thanks trickled off Quaint's cheek and fell upon her hand. To Eleanor there was loveliness in every look and feature. Dress of other days, hair combed as a mother would comb it then, a look of cheerful fondness upon her devoted face, what wonder that her son had a heart with such a willing spirit of adoration?



“And some say that love is a commodity, to be bought and sold, or to be put off at pleasure,” murmured Eleanor. Another prolonged silence had fallen into their talk, making their very thoughts as real as words.

“Strange barter that would be, really,” said Quaint, musingly. “It would be like lowering a divine creation to the level of the human will, as I see it. The birds do not love that way. And yet ministers, professing to be servants of God’s will, say grace over an out-and-out faithless marriage, — will actually tie a knot which the whole world secretly regrets because of its barrenness of even a semblance of love. It is enough to make cynics of us outright. One’s smile of good cheer is all that keeps a fellow up.”

“But society commends it, the law sanctions it, and there we are,” complained Eleanor. “However, when the world gets to know the insignificance of this one life, so full of petty rivalries and artifices, as compared with the endless chain of lives we are living, material, earthly ends will not count for much. Souls are made broad as they


come into a knowledge of the length and breadth of the universe."

"And heaven is to be found in all these lives?" asked Quaint, turning a full gaze into his loved one's eyes.

"Yes, indeed. To escape heaven is to deny it. To seek heaven is to live a life of harmony and good-will. This one life of ours is but a day in eternity."

"I do believe you — with all my heart I do," confessed Quaint, impulsively kissing her studious brow. With his own limited vision he did not so much as know why he was thus persuaded.

"In the strictest sense there is no treasured-up material wealth," continued Eleanor, after a moment's thought. "Even personality fades and grows less with time. Sex is a myth also, and disappears in lives to come. In the lower strata of life the masculine and the feminine are apparently separate. In the divine they are one. This makes us all lovers in one sense. To know this is to understand the uses of sex as it exists upon this planet, after which it is wise to forget that we are either men or women. Some-



time the masculine and the feminine will find a balance within us, and then we shall no longer be slaves to passion or greed. Looking at it in that light, marriage becomes holy at once. There is no bargain or sale, for it is Nature's own expression of the holiness of love."

"You surprise me, indeed you do; where did you learn all this?" asked Quaint, wondering. "Here I have been buffeting about the country, getting glimpses of life in every possible phase, and you, a woman, a creature of home, a living source of happiness for all about you, have been lifting the veil and taking a peep into eternity, even. Do I put it too strongly? Well, then, you have learned a thing or two somehow,—not with your reason, I know. If not with your reason, how then do you get it?"

"From the inner, diviner self,—that self which is hidden from human eyes."

"I see—yes," and Quaint grew suddenly thoughtful. "Do you know, that confirms my pet notions about self-made men and women. They get to the front—you can't shut them out—because it's in them; and,

first you know, they are on top in spite of poverty or opposition. *They* get their power from within, I presume."

"Never from without. The suggestion of what they are to be is born with them. Their simple wills move along the path of destiny without antagonism to the great Will. But such as they are old souls, who have learned the secret of existence through many previous lives."

Quaint listened, still mildly astonished. All this was new to him indeed. While they talked the old clock in the corner ticked slowly on, and in the midst of the reverie began whirring forth the midnight hour. Quaint counted the strokes, then bent and kissed the lips which had told him so much.

"That for the new day of my life," he said slowly and fondly. "I do believe I have never lived before. Can we not make this hour one never to be forgotten?"

"To be remembered throughout all eternity, yes. True happenings never fade. It is the discord we forget," and Eleanor spoke like one supremely happy.

One o'clock came, and still they sat and talked and dreamed. Thus passed this first hour of Quaint's chosen new existence. It was an hour long to be remembered, indeed. When he at last took his lamp to go to his room, his former burning fever of youthful love had vanished, and perfect peace of soul reigned in its stead. A mere "good-night," a pressing of the lips, and they parted as lovers part who are to know no separateness of being.

Reaching his room, he quietly closed the door, then set his lamp upon the dresser. Into the mirror he looked, and smiled. Yes, the same face as before, but how changed! It was true that he had lived ages in the past two days.

"Well, if the Almighty wills it thus, so mote it be," he said reverentially. It was a sort of prayer after his fashion of prayers, and it gave him an unparalleled rest within.

Presently his eyes wandered to the portrait upon the wall. A tremor of doubt shot over him as his glance met that of his aged friend. But as he looked the eyes grew less severe. A soft light as of some secret tolerance

seemed to creep upon the features, which seemed to say: "Young man, are you satisfied now?" Quaint advanced and looked his censor straight in the eye.

"Yes, satisfied, — a thousand times satisfied!" he said slowly and dispassionately. "May the shadows of night never darken the lot of her who has become the princess of my heart, my guide, my all! Heaven bless her and her fatherless babe through all eternity!"

He would have added a fond "amen," only that he wished his prayer to go on indefinitely. He would make his entire life a prayer without end. However, to know, to be so fully aware that he had indeed put a prayer into words, exalted him as nothing else could have done.

When he at last put out his light and got into bed, all his recent happenings seemed supremely just.

"Can earth indeed a heaven be,
Unless the heart from guile be free?"

This simple old couplet which his mother used to sing to him came back into his memory and tempered his dreams with perfect love, as of old.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BUT duty calls us to action even in our sublimest moments. Though a lover in fact, our hero was a traveling salesman still. Yet the farewells this time were different. In spirit there was no separation, hence the parting words were spoken without that longing which tempers our lives ere peace has entered in. Toward Boston Quaint turned his face, once more willing that the iron hand of trade should feel his humble efforts, — willing, even so indeed! Could he not now work with a more gifted insight into the affairs of men and even better understand the missions of angels?

At New Haven the sonorous chant of the colored porter, as he entered the car, had much music in it for him, though the ample basket, filled with delicacies as before, tempted Quaint not in the least. Had the Widow Thorne been present they might both have enjoyed a cozy repast.

As the train spun on toward Hartford, Quaint dreamed and marveled not a little at life and its ups and downs as he had found them. What folly to believe that the human will can stay the hand of Destiny! Born to act with love for all mankind, pledged to live for others, and to respond faithfully to the biddings of the inner self, must be a man's passport into heaven, of course. But would Saint Peter quibble because a wayfarer from earth had followed his own queer promptings, even to the extent of falling in love with one of the Saint's own earth-angels? Quaint smiled, and said mentally that he guessed not, on general principles.

In the midst of his musings a happy thought struck him. It was early in the day; and why should he not stop off and see Foxy's dear parent, who now lived quite alone in the world? The fond, clinging mother had written him just one letter, — a letter bathed in tears of bitter anguish. Now the sharp edge of her grief may have worn away. He believed he would stop and see her, at any rate.

The station reached, he set his grips inside the hotel and sauntered down the highway toward the humble cottage. There was quiet everywhere about the premises. The door stood open, and Quaint strolled in with a full heart and anxious gaze. Nobody there. The little bedroom where he last saw Foxy was unoccupied, but the bed looked tidy and restful. Just as he came out of the cottage a neighbor passed.

"You will find her over yonder," she said, pointing to the church-yard, in which nestled the white slabs and monuments to the departed dead. With now a stray tear in his eye Quaint sauntered on and strove to collect himself. But the thumping under his vest was not so easily stilled.

Through the moss-green gate he went, and followed the aged paths between the graves. Now in the very presence of the perfect stillness, — stillness in which the twitter of the birds was the only audible note of reverence, — a mighty peace came suddenly upon him. He could have smiled with a boyish freedom. Yes ; there kneeled the widow beside Foxy's grave, true to her mother instinct, and bent

with grief. She was fondling a tiny flower which grew above the new-made sod.

“My dear woman, is it so hard to bear?” spoke Quaint, in a tone of perfect sympathy.

A little startled at first, the widow cast a hurried glance up at him, then as she arose a sweet smile of gratitude flitted across her features. With his utter lack of self-training Quaint flung his arms about her and kissed her trembling lips. Then he stood beside her with a generous smile of inquiry.

“Not so bad — indeed, it is not so bad,” urged Quaint, in tones most comforting.

A burst of renewed grief convulsed the mother-heart; and while it lasted Quaint supported her swaying form with his strong arms still thrown about her. When she at last grew calm, he bade her sit down with him beside the grave. In spite of himself, Quaint could not feel a great degree of sorrow. What had death to do with them who know no separateness?

“Foxy is in heaven!” spoke Quaint, with unruffled assurance.

A sudden light beamed in the mother’s

face. "If God wills it so," she said, casting her eyes upward.

"I have not a single doubt of it," replied Quaint, now with a happy smile of inspiration.

"And yet —" here the widow stopped and looked at Quaint through her tears. "Are you sure of what you say?" she asked, with a tender meekness.

"Yes, a thousand times yes! I know it!"

"Still the Parson does n't —"

"Oh, fie on the Parson! It is all very well to call the Parson in at funerals, weddings, and the like, but what does he know about heaven? I say Foxy is saved, — I know it!"

"Who tells you that?"

"Who tells me?" and Quaint's cheeks began to burn with fever. "Why, I was told by lips that never err. My inner being tells me so, besides."

"What human lips are there which never err?" asked the widow, now strong enough to look Quaint steadily in the eye.

"True, you may be right there," bridled Quaint. But he rallied quickly and said,

"She whom I love, my guide, my ideal, my all. *She* knows of heaven, indeed."

"And does she know that Foxy was not —"

"What, — a Christian? Oh, well, Foxy was all right. On the day of his birth he was given a passport straight into heaven. Why, at that very moment he even entered heaven, and so did you. Don't you remember how sacred the event was to everybody? Heaven is right here this very moment. Foxy was a noble fellow in spite of the Parson's insinuations. No one knows that better than I. He didn't profess much, but, do you know, when it came to the tug of friendship he was there every time. Such creatures slip into Paradise naturally. They carry heaven with them, in fact, and make other people comfortable somehow. So I say, my dear woman, mourn no more, and I'll stand by you from now out. You see I am to be a fixture on earth for some little time yet; I feel it in my bones."

"And she told you — was it a woman who told you that?"

"Yes, a woman, — a woman with soul and

spirit united, an advocate of the gospel of the heart, a disciple of love and fair dealing, — can you ask for better proof ? ”

“ And yet Paul said — ”

“ Oh, come, now,” again interrupted Quaint, half humorously. “ Paul could n’t even have comprehended the real, live, rounded-out woman of to-day. I tell you such lips as hers are never silent. Their very curves of beauty talk even in her sleep, and angels would love to stoop and kiss them — if they were given a chance,” he added half dreamily.

“ Do you love her as much as that ? ”

“ Do I love her ? Did I love Foxy ? Well, then, multiply that love by the area of the universe, and you have only a tithe of my love for her who says Foxy is in heaven. Listen, now ; I have even come to grant you a share in my long since settled convictions.”

A light of holy conflict shone in the widow’s wide-open eyes, but this seemed to grow less as the moments flew by. During the silence the birds sang sweeter, the sun shone with a more comforting warmth, and the plain white meeting-house, with its old-time gables, its row of sheds about it, the


queer little belfry, the sportive weather-vane on its top, all of which seemed in their perfect simplicity to belong to God's chosen people, indeed, reminded Quaint that there was in this primitive New England life a wealth vastly greater than that of India, only let the heart and soul be attuned to the discovery of it.

At last a smile such as Quaint had never before seen overspread the widow's entire features.

"Yes, I know it now; the scales are lifted," she murmured in tones of a delightful faith. "I have believed it all along, but I dared not say it aloud."

The poor soul was comforted at last, and in a moment of abandonment of self she gave vent to a burst of joyful weeping. After that she looked calmly up at Quaint and smiled.

"Never will I doubt again," she said with that measure of peace known only to God's own children of earth. She was as strong as if youth had again overtaken her. And the smile upon Quaint's still generous face was deep and grateful.



CHAPTER XXV.

I, PERCY ALEXANDER CURRYWELL, senior member of the firm of Currywell & Cramps, of Boston, during a moment of respite from the unceasing tedium of business, beg a mere word upon a subject which at times assumes a most vital and consequential importance. It was I who requested the reader of this book to take a run down the road with our prince of salesmen; and now sincerely let me ask, have you observed to your fill the peculiar drift of Quaint's every-day life? Did you in your calmer moments make a mental picture of him? or, what is better still, have you succeeded in classifying him in the great category of moving curiosities, as per my request? Of course you have; and now that Quaint is back in Boston, even I — nearly double the age of this hobby-riding Jesuit — look forward to our mutual handshake with not a little expectancy, since

Quaint — ah, there he comes now, grips in hand and a grin upon his face fit for an emperor.

“Chippy! see here, my elderly friend, look up and say grace instanter.”

Of course I raise my head from my letters with a tired look and a badly counterfeited indifference. But Quaint’s grip is one of iron and nervous energy. To shake his hand has always seemed to me a privilege never to be slighted.

“Glad to see you back,” I say, quite mannerly, and preserving the dignity of the house for the moment, at least.

“Thanks again,” smiles Quaint, at the same time taking a chair with much of his old-time freedom and cheeriness.

“You are looking the picture of health,” I remark.

“And why not health?” wisely interposes Quaint, with a glance which means volumes. “Do you know, Chippy, a fellow can’t get through life very well without it. He can’t begin to escape all the ruts and quagmires without a lively skin and a good circulation of the blood. As I have told you before, I

have n't much use for that indoor apostle who thumbs his catechism and hymn-book and sighs, and looks demure on rainy days, and gets sallow and dies. Of course such habits are becoming as respectable as they are common, I know; but what's the use? Can you tell me that?"

And as I sit there and open letter after letter, and listen to Quaint's rambling though sometimes tortuous reasonings, I pause and look within. Has he not, in all his unimpeachable innocence, his plain, open speech which knows no master save its own uncertain limits, hit upon a grain of truth? Yes; and can or will a world of zealots and seekers after riches ever live to evolve a better creed than Quaint is even now the happy possessor of?

"By the way, Chippy," breathes Quaint, in a tone of extreme confidence, — "that letter to the widow. You remember I sent it here by mistake. Can you ever forgive a blunder like that? It was a thunder-clap from a clear sky to me. Did you read it?"

"Certainly not, Quaint."


"I'll wager my hat you didn't; but since

you let the chance go by, you should at least have read the answer I received. It was the sweetest epistle a woman ever penned. You could have taken it all in in a flash; I could n't. And that yarn in the 'Globe' about my escapade in Hartford. Did you read that?"

"Funny circumstance," I remark considerably.

"Yes; but let me give you the facts," and Quaint leans over my desk, I give a willing assent, and he pours his tale of love into my ear quite as any mellow-hearted fellow might do who had so valorously played the part of a hero, and who was every bit conscious of having scored a victory. I almost weep tears of congratulation for him, and half wish myself free from the toils of business cares, that I might in some startling way or other emulate his cheery example. But no; I could not have lived Quaint's life if I would. The world is n't so adjusted. I give Quaint a look half of incredulity, then with some sternness of words I ask,—

"My dear man, are you engaged to that woman down yonder?"



Quaint's eyes grow large at first, then a smile breaks upon his lips truly worth observing. Then he shakes with laughter until tears fall from his beaming orbs.

"But it's natural, Chippy,—it's natural; somehow it is—you know that. Beg your pardon, however; but must a fellow never be a slave to the wiles of Fate?"

"Surely you do not intend to quit the road, Quaint."

"Not till I have lived to forget my name. No; I am with you body and soul from this hour on." Quaint's words suddenly drop to a monotone of still deeper confidence.

"While I think of it, Chippy, let's us two do this: let's live and die in the harness,—up to our ears, if you will, in love for everybody; be straight, be tender in the bits when it comes to judging others; and if we can't pray as loud as some, let's *do*,—counts as much as praying, sometimes, I take it,—and perhaps we shall get to heaven naturally. Is it a go?"

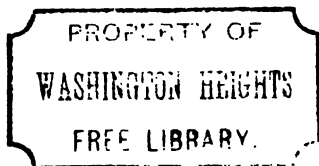
A strange, fabulous creature is Quaint. My very soul goes out toward him, and I begin to wonder where the Good Samaritans

of earth have been keeping themselves so long. I have never heard a sweeter sermon preached from the pulpit, never. Would I join him? But he seems to catch my response without words. After the mantle of seriousness has been lifted a little, I say half drolly, —

“What about those foreign missions, Quaint? Have you thrown up your hand?”

An irrepressible mirth instantly lurks about Quaint's lips. Then he heaves a sigh and looks down as if slightly troubled.

“Well, it's a little tough on a fellow, I know. But I guess I will try home missions for a time—and then —”





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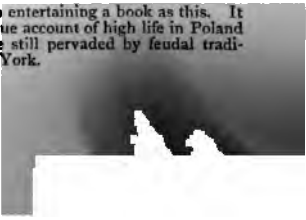
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